

IS ALEC STEWART A WINNER?

... or is England's new captain just a stopgap?

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THE INDEPENDENT

Newspaper of the Year for photographs

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Revealed: FO links to mercenaries

By Andrew Buncombe and Fran Abrams

SENIOR Foreign Office officials met mercenaries planning to help overthrow the Sierra Leone regime just five weeks before an embargo-hunting shipment of arms was delivered to anti-government forces.

The Independent has learnt that officials from Sandline International Ltd - who describe themselves as "military consultants" - met officials led by Craig Murray, deputy head of the FO's Africa (equatorial) department. Sandline was represented at the meeting by Lt-Col Tim Spicer, a Falklands veteran and the former

Army spokesman in Bosnia. Sandline has claimed that while it breached the UN arms embargo by shipping arms to Sierra Leone, the delivery had been sanctioned by the Government. The arms were used by forces trying to reinstate the former President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. He was finally reinstated in March this year.

A criminal investigation has been launched by officers from the National Intelligence Service - the investigative arm of HM Customs and Excise - into the shipment and into the role played by British officials and Ministers. The FO has insisted that at no point was ministerial approval for Sandline's actions ever given.

The FO has admitted that Peter Penfold, the High Commissioner for Sierra Leone, did meet Sandline officials, but yesterday refused to comment on whether other officials met mercenaries. A spokesman said he was unable to comment on the advice of government lawyers. Mr Murray, who was appointed last year, also refused to comment. Sandline also refused to comment.

The Independent understands that officials met Lt-Col Spicer on up to three occasions, at least one of which took place at FO premises. There was also a meeting at Sandline's London headquarters in Chelsea. One of the meetings is understood to have taken

place on 19 January. Up to 30 tons of arms - provided by Sandline - were flown to Sierra Leone from Bulgaria on 21 February. Training was also supplied by Sandline to assist up to 40,000 pro-Kabbah militia and the Nigerian army who also supported the former President.

Yesterday the row over the possible involvement of the Government deepened when Michael Howard, the shadow Foreign Secretary, demanded that the Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, make a statement on the matter. "There are many questions that need to be answered," he said. "When did Mr Cook first know of these allegations? When did Mr Cook's of-

ficials first know of these allegations. What action did he take?"

However, Tony Lloyd, a Foreign Office minister, yesterday said Mr Cook and his team were kept in the dark over Sandline's involvement. He told a Commons select committee that although a Customs investigation was launched in February, ministers did not know about it until last weekend.

He told the committee that in March he had asked his officials about newspaper claims that Sandline helped to reinstate President Kabbah, but had still not been told about the Customs inquiry.

Last March he told the Commons that Britain did not support the way

the "counter coup" had been organised. Yesterday David Willshire, the Conservative MP for Spelthorne, told him at the committee hearing: "I started out feeling angry. I now feel sorry for you. I think you have been hung out to dry by officials. Time may show us that you have been hung out to dry by the Foreign Secretary."

President Kabbah was ousted in May 1997 in a bloody coup by Johnny Paul Koroma. He spent his exile in Conakry, the capital of neighbouring Guinea where the British diplomatic mission led by Mr Penfold had also transferred. Mr Penfold is to be questioned by Customs officers

this week about his involvement and the possibility that he asked Sandline to come in. On 12 March Mr Lloyd reported to parliament a speech by President Kabbah on the day he was returned to power in which he said: "The British Prime Minister and his government also deserve our special thanks for their support and assistance in every respect."

Last night Lord Avebury, the Liberal Democrat peer who brought Sandline's involvement to the attention of the Foreign Office, said Robin Cook should now ask President Kabbah to impound the weapons so their origin could be traced through their serial numbers.

Albright ups the stakes for peace

Middle East Editor

CONFRONTED by the total collapse of the Middle East "peace process" in London yesterday, the US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, last night took the dangerous gamble of buying precious time by upping the stakes.

She offered the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and the PLO chairman, Yasser Arafat, a meeting with President Clinton in Washington in five days' time - on condition they accept American proposals that include a move to final status talks and probably severe restriction on the amount of land the Palestinians can ever hope to regain from the Israelis.

The offer - totally deforming the original 1993 Oslo agreement which envisages a series of extensive Israeli withdrawals before discussions on Jerusalem, settlements and refugees - is a sign of Mrs Albright's desperation. Indeed, it is a sign of Mr Arafat's desperation that he appears to have accepted it. Mr Netanyahu returned to Israel yesterday to consult with his cabinet - but without accepting.

There was some confusion as to whether Mrs Albright - who was both confused and hesitant in replies to journalists in London last night - understood the full significance of what she had announced. A later Downing Street briefing suggested that the move to what the Secretary of State called "accelerated permanent status negotiations" included talks on further Israeli "withdrawals" (sic), security and "confidence-building measures". But that is not what the permanent status negotiations in the Oslo agreement say.

The original document lists the topics for decision as "Jerusalem, refugees, settle-

ments, security arrangements, borders, relations and co-operation with other neighbours, and other issues of common interest."

For almost a year, Mr Netanyahu himself has been pressing the Palestinians to move straight to the final-status talks, meanwhile dropping discussions of further withdrawals.

Is this really what Mr Arafat has accepted? As one Palestinian journalist put it last night: "Poor Abu Amar [Arafat's name], he'll never sell this to the Palestinians."

During the day, it was said that the Americans - whose compromise proposal for the next Israeli withdrawal had settled on a 13 per cent (Israel wants only 9 per cent) evacuation - had produced a new Israeli figure of 11 per cent. Palestinian sources suggested that the Americans urged Arafat to accept the new statistic with a "promise" to achieve another 2 per cent withdrawal afterwards. The PLO turned the offer down.

In reality, Mrs Albright - and Tony Blair - have understood that Mr Netanyahu and Mr Arafat agree on only one thing: a desire that the other should be blamed for the destruction of the Middle East "peace process". The invitation to Washington is thus intended to force both sides to show their desire for "peace" by turning up. Mrs Albright momentarily appeared to support this idea by threatening that "if agreement is not reached, we will have to examine our approach to the peace process." But fear not, she then added that "we are not going to walk away from a peace process because it's important to the US, to Israel and to our friends in the Middle East". In the Middle East, however, events have a habit of taking over when negotiations collapse.

Albright's fear, page 10



Buying time: Madeleine Albright fielding questions from reporters at yesterday's press conference. Photograph: Jeff Moore

Protestors plan to run Brum off the road

By Ian Burrell

Home Affairs Correspondent

MILITANT anti-road protest-ers are planning to hijack one of the greatest days in the history of Birmingham.

As world leaders convene for the G8 Summit in the city in ten days' time, it is claimed that thousands of protesters from the Reclaim the Streets movement will be attempting to cripple Birmingham's transport infrastructure.

The radical environmental group, which is dedicated to overthrowing the "cult of the motor car", has pledged to blockade roads and obstruct traffic with mobile sound systems and performance artists.

A spokesman for Reclaim

the Streets said the action, titled "Gyrate not G8", would have a mischievous edge with clowns trying to ambush government leaders and their "corporate cronies" with custard pies.

He said: "In Birmingham there will be eight men deciding what is going to happen to the rest of the world. This action will give ordinary people the experience of taking some power themselves."

It is not an idle threat. Previous actions by Reclaim the Streets have created chaos in London. Three years ago, protesters put down carpets and food stalls in Upper Street, Islington, one of Britain's busiest roads. As traffic tailbacks built up, an armoured personnel carrier broadcast music by Jimi



Hendrix. Other actions have seen Camdeo High Street, north London, blockaded for the day, and the M41 motorway in west London occupied by

thousands of protesters on bicycles.

Ironically for a city which has long celebrated its links with the motor industry, Birmingham has recently redesigned much of its city centre to cater for pedestrians.

But the greening initiative did not impress Reclaim the Streets. "Pedestrianisation is not the answer," said the spokesman. "We need to tackle the root causes of traffic."

West Midlands Police and Birmingham City Council are aware of the planned protest and are taking contingency action. A police spokesman said: "Any lawful protest we have no problem with. But we have contingencies should they become unlawful."

British team leads race for cancer 'cure'

By Jeremy Laurence

Health Editor

BRITISH scientists expect to beat American colleagues to be the first to test a new approach to cancer treatment in humans which works by cutting the blood supply to the tumour.

Fifty patients will be selected at Mount Vernon hospital, Middlesex, to evaluate the approach, which attracted attention at the weekend after US scientists revealed its success against tumours in mice. It featured angiostatin and endostatin, which, when given in combination, target the blood supply to the tumour, cutting off nutrients it needs to survive and grow. The drugs appear to be effective against all solid tumours including breast, colon, and lung, and differ from conventional chemotherapy, which directly attacks the cancer cells.

The work, the culmination of 30 years' research, was described as remarkable by Richard Klausner, head of the National Cancer Institute, who said he was giving it priority for development. This triggered a fivefold leap in the share price of Entremed, the company hoping to market the drugs.

But yesterday it became clear the Mount Vernon team, based at the Cancer Research Campaign's Gray Laboratories, is doing almost identical work and expects to begin human clinical trials this year, before the Americans.

The team announced a year ago that tests on mice using the drug combretastatin had shown it selectively attacked blood vessels supplying tumours. David Secher, director of drug development for the Cancer Research Campaign, said: "We have spent the last 12 months preparing for clinical trials and we hope to start them before the end of the year... But it is far too early to say whether it is going to be effective. To hail it as a breakthrough would be irresponsible."

About 30 patients would be given the drug in the first phase to test its safety and set the right dose. That trial, lasting a year to 18 months, would be followed by a second-phase trial involving a similar number of patients over six to 12 months which would test its efficacy. "We would hope at the end of that time to have some indication of whether the drug is active," Dr Secher said.

The US research has been led by Judah Folkman, of Boston Children's hospital, who has worked on angiogenesis - the growth of blood vessels - for 30 years. Dr Secher said: "He has been doing excellent work... but no one took much notice until now. We in Britain may end up starting human clinical trials earlier but we do not see it as a competition. We want to evaluate whether angiogenesis inhibition plays a role in the treatment of cancer."

Hamish McRae, page 21

Today's news

Vatican mystery

The Vatican broke with tradition by offering an explanation for the murder of the newly appointed captain commander of the Papal guard. Page 3

Everest push

Stephen Goodwin writes what could be his last diary from Base Camp at Everest before the push for the mountain's 8,848m summit of Everest. Page 9

Picasso sting

A professional cat burglar, whose victims allegedly included Sophia Loren and Elizabeth Taylor, came out of retirement to steal a Picasso only to be arrested to a sting. Page 5



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Murder at the Vatican leaves Pope baffled

By Anne Hanley
in Rome

PATHOLOGISTS yesterday removed two bullets from the body of Alois Estermann, 44, the newly-appointed captain commander of the Vatican's Swiss Guard who was killed on Monday night in what the Pope described as a "humanly incomprehensible" incident.

If the Pope was baffled by the killing, not so his spokesman Joaquin Navarro Valls who broke with normal practice and offered an explanation at the same time at the deaths of Mr Estermann, his wife, Gladys Meza Romero, and a 23-year-old guard, Cedric Tornay, were announced. "The information which has emerged up to this point," Mr Navarro Valls told a midnight press conference, "allows for the theory of a fit of madness by Vice-Corporal Tornay."

Yesterday, evidence emerged to back up this theory. From such a traditionally secretive organisation as the Vatican, such openness left many commentators wondering what the Holy See was trying to hide.

The deaths, the first inside the walls of the Vatican in centuries, occurred at around 9pm on Monday. Seven hours earlier, Mr Estermann had been appointed commander-in-chief of the Swiss Guard, the military corps responsible for the Pope's personal safety and security within the Vatican state.

"The wife of another Swiss guard who lives in the apartment next door to the Estermanns heard loud noises, and ran out of her flat to find the door ajar," Mr Navarro Valls said. Inside, she found three bodies. Vatican doctors and security forces were called, Mr Estermann, his wife and Tornay were declared dead and Tornay's service pistol was found beneath his body with five bullets missing.

As presented by Mr Navarro Valls, the case against Tornay seems

watertight. In February, after three years in the Guard, the vice-corporal received a "polite but firm" letter from Mr Estermann - at the time the acting commander - reprimanding him for unacceptable conduct, and in particular for failing to show up in barracks one night.

This, the Vatican press office chief said, led Tornay to complain frequently to fellow guards about his treatment. Over the past few days, on discovering he was not included on a list of guards to be honoured by the Pope at a ceremony due to take place today, Tornay's lamentations became more bitter. On Monday evening, an hour and a half before the shootings took place, the vice-corporal handed a letter to a friend, telling him to make sure it reached his parents should anything happen to him. The contents were not disclosed by the Vatican.

Mr Navarro Valls suggested the vice-corporal's recent break-up with his Roman girlfriend, his difficult character, and other "small incidents" which can sometimes "explode into something illogical", could have affected his state of mind.

But this did not reconcile with statements from others who knew and worked with him. "Cedric Tornay was an extremely normal boy and I really find it very difficult to conceive of him having a fit of madness," said Jacques Antoine Fierz who served in the Swiss Guard until 1995.

The Holy See's uncharacteristic haste to provide a plausible explanation for the tragedy had Vatican old hands openly doubting the sincerity of the move.

Above all, it begged a worrying question: if the name of Cedric Tornay is being taken in vain, and he was not responsible for this "murder-suicide", the killer is still at large. And that killer, armed and dangerous, is wandering the corridors of the Vatican.



Gunned down: Alois Estermann, the newly-appointed commandant of the papal Swiss Guard, was found shot dead along with his wife and another Swiss Guard in the Vatican
Photograph: Reuters

Small but élite corps with a proud record of selfless devotion to duty

By Anne Hanley

MAY 6 is the feast day of the Swiss Guard, the sole remaining military corps in the Vatican State. Had everything gone to plan, present and former guards, families and friends would be celebrating today.

Instead, they will be attending a funeral service in Saint Peter's Basilica to mourn their newly appointed commander, Alois Estermann, and his wife, Gladys Meza Romero. The service will also commemorate Cedric

Tornay, the corporal believed to have shot them before committing suicide. His "fit of madness" - if the Vatican line proves correct - casts a pall over a corps with a remarkably unblemished record since its foundation in 1506. The May 6 feast marks the tragedy of 1527, when the crack regiment of Swiss mercenaries defended Pope Clement VII against the invading forces of Charles V; 147 of the Guard were mown down. Today

the corps, the only military body not axed in 1970, when Pope Paul VI reformed the most militarised state in the world, numbers 100. Until this week they did well: for centuries, no murders had taken place within the area which is now the Vatican State. The Guard's success can be put down partly to the pacific nature of this tiny state, but also to the expertise of a corps which is a highly trained unit well-versed in crowd control and in single combat, including martial arts.

The commoner who displayed an uncommon degree of valour

IN THE NEWS

ALOIS ESTERMANN

ALOIS ESTERMANN led the Swiss Guard for six months before being formally appointed as its captain commander on Monday morning, writes Anne Hanley. Seven hours later he was dead, gunned down along with his wife in their apartment inside the Vatican.

Estermann was a man seemingly without enemies, and his violent death stunned his men. "Anyone present last night as the news broke will have seen the reaction," said Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro Valls yesterday. "Tears flowed, and it was understandable. He was very popular."

Born 44 years ago in Günsell, Estermann was an official in the Swiss army before applying for a transfer to the Vatican. He entered the Holy See's only military force in 1980 as captain, was promoted to major in 1983, lieutenant colonel in 1989, and quartermaster in 1989. In the same year he was made second-in-command of the 100-strong force.

An able linguist, and a student of theology, Estermann married Venezuelan lawyer Gladys Meza Romero in 1983. She died with him on Monday. The couple had no children. "We know that if the Lord wills it, children will come along," he told the *La Repubblica* daily hours before his death.

Famous as the man who threw himself in front of the wounded Pope on 13 May 1981 to protect him from further injury as a Turkish terrorist shot at him in Saint Peter's square. He subsequently led the papal bodyguard on over 30 pastoral trips abroad. His dedication to the Pontiff and the Guard also endeared him to the soldiers which make up the Pope's bodyguard. Ursula Benschger, a friend of 15 years' standing, said: "Over the last six months, be-

fore his appointment on Monday, all the guards I know said the same thing. 'We're so well off with Estermann in charge.' They all, to a man, wanted Estermann to stay."

Yet in the Vatican, not back home in Switzerland, there were those who were not wholly convinced by Estermann's qualities, as the delay in his appointment as commander of a force which he had been running since his predecessor retired in November last year showed.

"The selection process is a long and complicated one, hampered by historical factors," said Navarro Valls in an effort to explain away the hold-up. "And sometimes when you're looking for the right person, you don't even notice that the perfect candidate is right under your nose."

Navarro Valls neglected to explain why Estermann's nomination took so much longer than that of his predecessors. Nor would he comment on the killed officer's plan to overhaul the Guard. And as for suggestions that Estermann's biggest drawback was his lack of blue blood, that topic was brushed aside in yesterday's press conference.

"This was a favourite topic for speculation amongst the Swiss community in Rome," said Benschger. "Estermann's predecessor Roland Buchs was not noble either. Two commoners in succession was pushing it for the Guard."

Grade's last C4 programmes too safe, says TV watchdog

By Paul McCann
Media Editor

MICHAEL Grade's final year of programmes at Channel 4 have been damned as too safe by the commercial television regulator in its annual report.

The Independent Television Commission also raised concerns about the spread of confessional chat shows like *Vanessa* and, for the second year running, condemned ITV's lack of variety.

Channel 4 "lost its drive" for innovation in 1997 and aired too few "landmark" programmes according to the ITC's annual performance review which was published yesterday. Sarah Thane, director of programming at the ITC, said in the past the channel has put on programmes like its "Gimme Shelter" and "Banned" seasons, but last year had an "high peaks" of minority interest programming.

The ITC is known to believe that Channel 4 spent too much of its energy promoting and buying programmes like *ER* and

Friends and not enough on its more fringe shows. It is also unhappy that 84 per cent of the foreign language films shown by the channel last year started after midnight.

"This is largely a review of the old management and the old money Channel 4 used to receive," said Sir Rohin Biggam, chairman of the ITC. "The new management came on board at absolutely the right time... Michael Jackson [Mr Grade's successor] had very little influence on last year."

Since Mr Grade's departure in May 1997, the Government has stopped the controversial funding formula whereby Channel 4 paid a percentage of its advertising revenue to ITV. In return for keeping this money, the channel's broadcasting licence has been re-written to make it produce more original programmes and use fewer American imports.

Yesterday, Jocelyn Hay, chairman of the Voice of the Listener and Viewer lobby group, echoed the ITC's view:



Grade: "Steered Channel 4 into financially safe waters"

"Michael Grade was a very good judge of popular taste and he certainly steered the channel into financially safe waters and increased audiences, which means the channel was perhaps riskier in catering for really minority audiences when it first started."

Mr Jackson, Channel 4's chief executive, said yesterday that the channel was already addressing the ITC recommendations.

The ITC report also criticised all broadcasters for daytime schedules that are over-reliant on confessional chat shows like *Vanessa* or *Oprah*. "They are an import and do raise concerns about the vulnerability of the people taking part and the general coarsening of society," said Sir Rohin Biggam.

ITV was again criticised by the commission for having too much drama at the expense of entertainment and comedy in its peak-time schedule.

"Network Centre drama output in 1997 increased once more to a level which is now nearly 26 per cent greater than that of 1993," says the report.

"Most of this is extremely popular and of high quality but it does crowd out other types of programmes. The network should achieve greater diversity."

Instead, the ITC wants the better comedy and entertainment from ITV and says its Saturday night line-up has become "excessively one-note".

Tickets go begging for Diana visit

By Ian Burrell
Home Affairs Correspondent

THOUSANDS of tickets to visit Althorp Park and the burial site of Diana, Princess of Wales, remain unsold despite frenzied interest nearly four months ago, when they first went on sale. The agency responsible for selling tickets for the opening of Althorp Park, the Spencer family home, told the *Independent* last night that nearly 8,000 tickets are still available.

It is thought the tickets remain unsold because of a widespread public belief that they were all sold in the first week of January, when they first went on sale. Millions of people from all over the world swamped credit-card phone lines with inquiries and within

four days 140,000 of the 152,000 tickets had been sold. But during the past four months demand has dried up.

The Spencer family opposes any form of advertising of the Althorp opening, which will allow 2,500 people a day to visit the grounds and family home during a two-month period from July 1. Rob Wilmshurst, group manager of the Nottingham-based ticket agency Way Ahead, which has sole rights to sell the tickets, said: "Without a doubt, people would be surprised to find out that tickets are still available."

This weekend it was again stated that all the 152,000 tickets had been sold amid reports that Earl Spencer was anxious that the ancestral home was not transformed into "Britain's answer to Graceland".

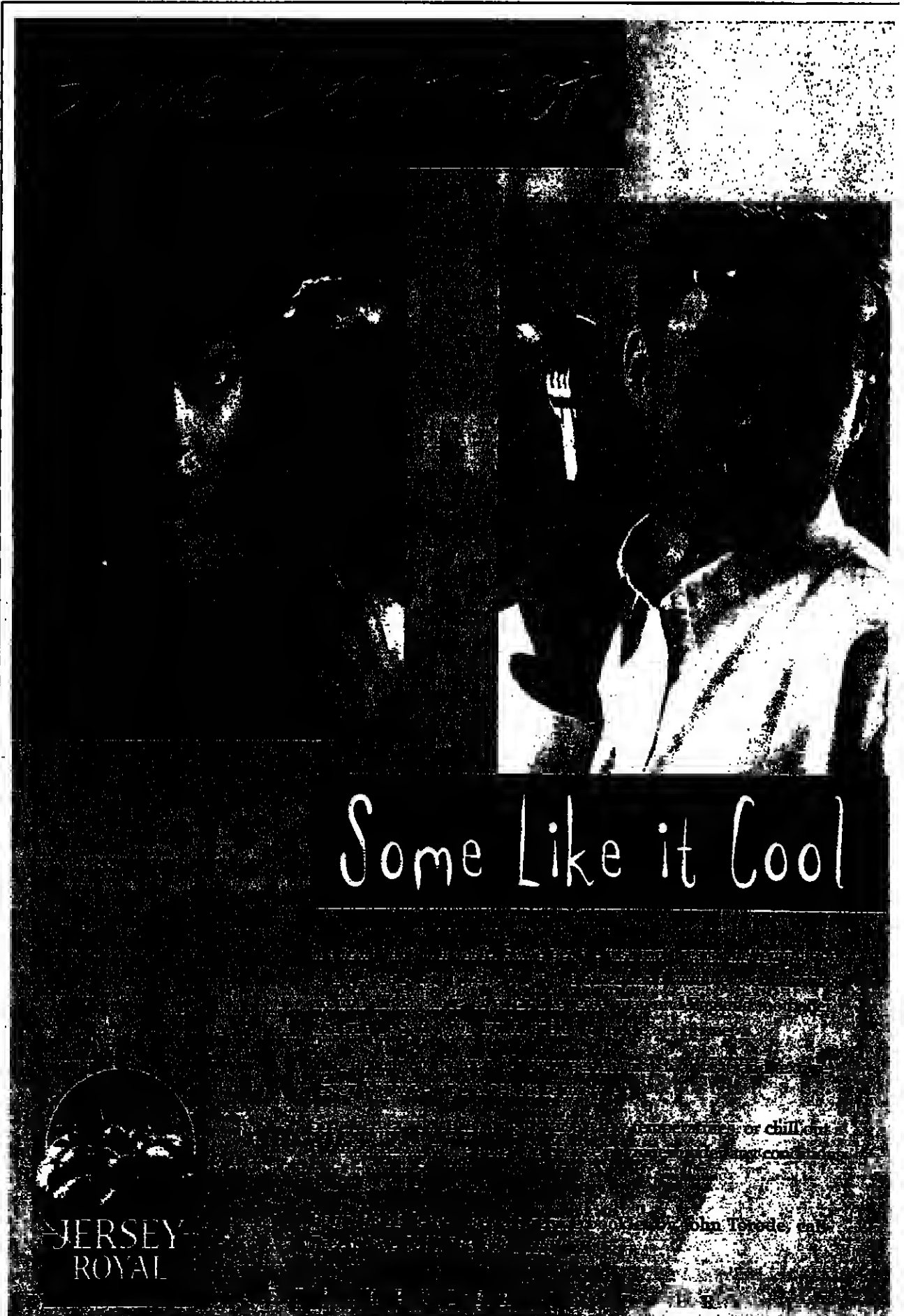
The earl said: "This is not a money-making venture, however good the cause might seem; it is meeting an obligation to those who wish to pay their final respects, whilst preserving the dignity of Althorp."

"It must never become Britain's answer to Graceland, and, whilst I live, it will never do so." Earl Spencer has repeatedly stated that he does not want Althorp to be turned into a tourist trap. The public opening will be for only two months each year and coach parties are not being accepted.

The earl has decided that an 18ft-high memorial will be built on the island where Diana is buried. A 4ft-high urn, made in a simple and classical design, will be elevated on a plinth.

At the lake edge, which is as close as tourists will get to the burial site, there is a simple temple that will have two marble memorials. One will bear a portrait of the Princess, designed by a local artist, and a three-line inscription taken from one of her speeches. The other will carry an extract from the earl's funeral service address at Westminster Abbey.

The announcement of charges of £2.50 for adults, £1 for pensioners and £5 for children caused controversy, as it was argued commercial gain was being made from Diana's death. But Mr Wilmshurst said: "Even if all the tickets were sold that would only generate £1.4m, which would not cover the staffing. This is not a money-making exercise." Selling Diana, page 18



Judges reject British move to ease beef ban

A GOVERNMENT attempt to have the worldwide ban on British beef exports declared illegal was rejected yesterday by the European Court in Luxembourg.

The judges said the European Commission did not exceed its powers when it banned exports of British beef, not just to the rest of the European Union but throughout the world. The ban was imposed in

March, 1996, in response to growing fears over the spread of BSE.

The Government lodged an immediate complaint that Eurocrats and other EU governments were acting politically and economically, to fend off a public backlash which could hit beef sales in the other member states. It also argued that the commission had no right to interfere in Britain's trade with countries be-

yond the EU. The case was adopted by the Labour government after its victory in last year's election.

Yesterday, however, the judges backed the commission's claim that it was only taking steps sufficient to contain the spread of mad cow disease by preventing British beef which might be exported to non-EU countries re-entering the EU.

The ban was triggered by fresh

information provided on 20 March 1996 by an independent scientific body set up to advise the British government, the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (Seac). The committee confirmed that "the most likely explanation" for the appearance of a new variant of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease - an incurable encephalopathy affecting humans - was exposure to BSE.

The judges said: "The new information significantly altered the perception of the risk which BSE represented for human health, and thus authorised the commission to adopt safeguard measures."

They added that the commission was empowered to immobilise and contain animals and animal products within a specified territory as "an appropriate measure" in the event of dis-

ease threatening a serious hazard to animals or humans. "In order for such containment to be effective, it is necessary to impose a total ban on the movement of animals and products outside the frontiers of the member state concerned, thereby affecting exports to third countries, furthermore those directives do not expressly preclude the commission from banning exports to third countries."

The court ruled that bearing in mind the probable link between BSE and CJD, and uncertainty about the effectiveness of anti-BSE measures, the commission did not exceed the bounds of its discretion.

The National Farmers' Union, which backed the Government's case, said it was disappointed by the ruling but pledged to maintain vigorous efforts to get the ban lifted soon.

Call to scrap teacher pay-review body

By Ben Russell
Education Correspondent

THE teachers' pay-review body should be scrapped to end a string of under-funded pay offers which have forced schools to push up class sizes, local-government employers said yesterday. They said rises over the past 11 years had put teachers and heads at the top of the town-hall pay league. Increases in pay had totalled 102 per cent for teachers and 114 per cent for heads since 1986, even outstripping the police.

In the meantime, repeated shortfalls in education budgets had forced councils to increase class sizes, pushing up teachers' workloads and driving down

morale, said Graham Lane, education chairman of the Local Government Association (LGA).

He condemned the Teachers Pay Review Body for ignoring the financial position of councils when recommending pay rises for teachers, and called for direct national negotiations on classroom pay and conditions to improve classroom morale.

Mr Lane said: "Teachers have had a few extra quid a week for teaching in some instances quite considerable extra numbers in the classroom."

Proposals from the LGA and the Local Government Management Board, which represents council employers, were

sent to ministers yesterday. At present the seven-member pay-review body is enshrined in law.

Local-government leaders want to replace it with direct annual talks with teacher unions.

Alternatively, council leaders suggest, the Government could set up a new wages council bringing together employers and unions, or move to bring teachers and employers into the existing review body.

Most teaching unions back the review body, although the largest, the National Union of Teachers, said it had been disappointed with its performance.

Mr Lane attacked the current review body for being out of touch with schools.

Big poppy crop swells heroin tide

By Ian Burrell
Home Affairs Correspondent

THE Government warned yesterday that the threat of a heroin epidemic in Britain has been greatly increased by a "bumper poppy crop" being harvested in Afghanistan.

George Foulkes, the Under-Secretary for International Development, said that both sides fighting in the Afghan civil war were being financed by the profits of drug production.

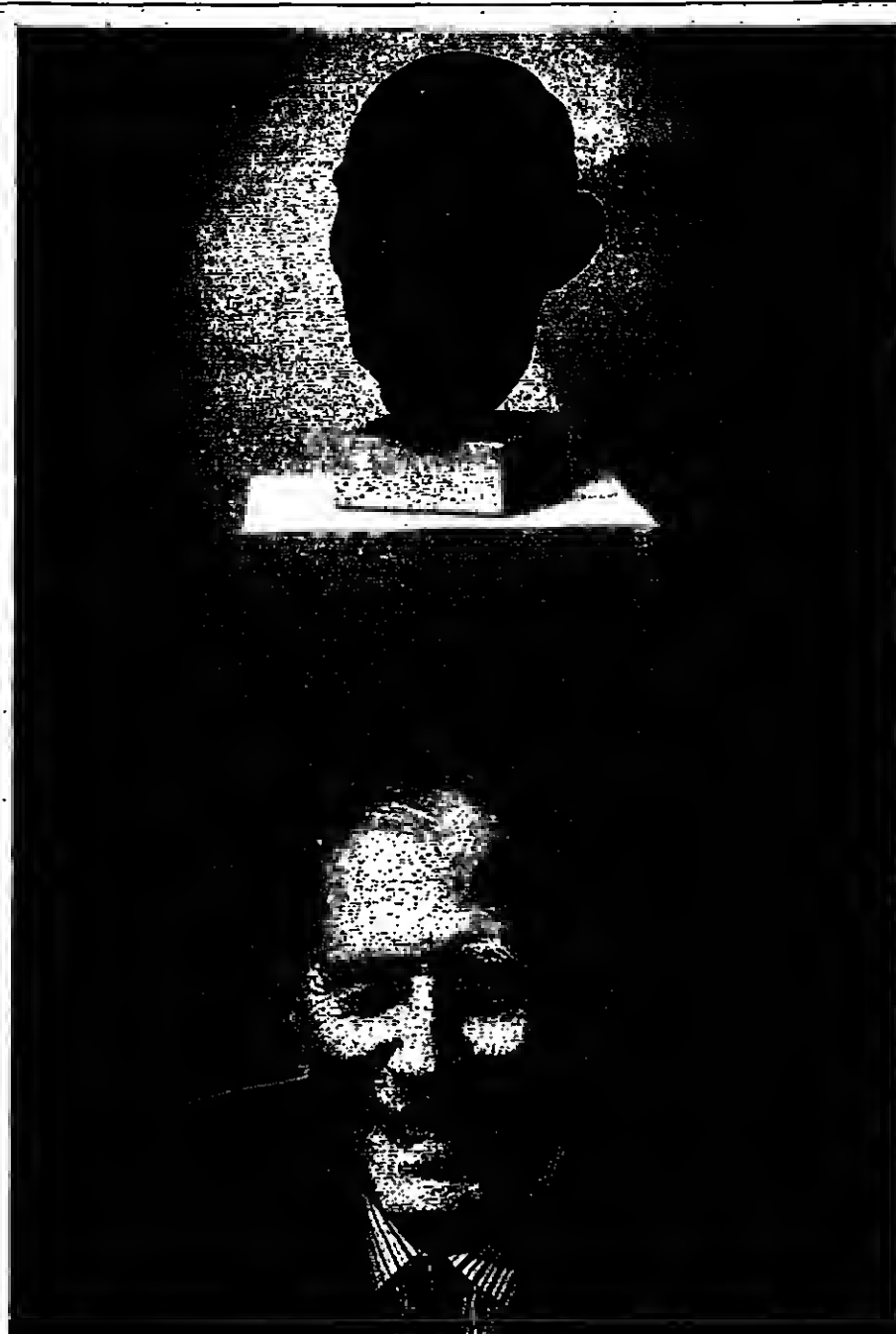
Afghanistan is the source of 95 per cent of the heroin which comes to Britain and Customs

officers have been alarmed at the scale of importation. A total of 1,747kg of heroin was seized in 1997, a tonne more than the previous year. Police estimate the haul has a street value of more than £145m and is the equivalent of nine million "wraps", Mr Foulkes said. "Doing something about Afghanistan is probably more important to Britain than any other overseas issue."

The minister's warning came on the day that Britain's first American-style drug court was launched, allowing some heroin-using criminals arrest-

ed in parts of West Yorkshire to be dealt with at a special court and sentenced to treatment. They will be forced to give urine samples twice a week to prove they are staying off drugs and if they repeatedly fail they could face prison.

The drug court will sit weekly at Wakefield magistrates court from June. Addicts arrested from this week will be bailed to attend the court. More than 20 magistrates are undergoing training in dealing with drug-related crime - thought to make up 70 per cent of crime committed in the area.



Face to face: Sir Roger Bannister with a bronze mask by Martin Jennings at the Society of Sculptors exhibition at The Gallery in London yesterday. Today is the 44th anniversary of Sir Roger's record-breaking sub-4-minute-mile. Photograph: Peter Macdarmid

Prisoner found hanged in cell

A MEMBER of a gang which murdered a South Wales jeweller has been found hanged in his cell at the privately-run Parc prison near Bridgend. The death is the second to occur at the prison which opened last November and is operated by Securicor.

Dallas Lee, aged 27, from Beddau, near Pontypridd, acted as getaway driver in a bungled robbery when Jerry Hales was fatally stabbed at his shop in Cowbridge. An appeal against his conviction had been pending.

Fashanu post-mortem

JUSTIN FASHANU, the footballer whose body was found in a garage at the weekend, hanged himself, Scotland Yard said yesterday. A police spokesman said that a post-mortem examination showed "death by suspension" and confirmed that there were no suspicious circumstances. Fashanu, 37, once rated as one of Britain's brightest young football stars, was found hanged at a set of garages in Shoreditch, east London. He fled to Britain after being charged with sexually assaulting a 17-year-old boy in the United States.

Boxer taken off ventilator

THE boxer Spencer Oliver, who suffered life-threatening injuries in a bout on Saturday night, has been taken off a ventilator and is starting to talk to medical staff and his family. He is expected to leave the intensive care unit of the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery in London by today. The 22-year-old super-bantamweight underwent a three-hour operation to remove a blood clot from his brain after being knocked down in a bout at the Royal Albert Hall. A spokesman for University College London Hospitals said "the risk to his life from this injury is now greatly reduced".

Playgroups to get more funds

A SMALL increase in funding for playgroups will be announced today by David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education, today. His announcement comes as playgroup campaigners record the closure of 424 playgroups or pre-schools during the past six months. They blame the closures on the increasing number of reception classes which now take four-year-olds.

Maiden voyage cancelled

THE maiden voyage from Southampton of the world's largest cruise ship, the 109,000-tonne *Grand Princess*, has been cancelled because work still needs to be done on the vessel.

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هنا من الأصل

Cabinet
heads
for clash
on union
rights

By Barry Carr

Tin Pan Alley set for a musical renaissance

By Clare Garner
and Carol Lipman

THE area around London's Tin Pan Alley - Denmark Street, in Soho - could be revitalised if proposals for a major national music centre are approved.

The planned multi-faceted music venue, which would include a large performance space, a hotel, a television station, a radio station, a satellite link, restaurants, bars and music-themed retail outlets, would be situated near Tottenham Court Road Underground station close by Denmark Street, the traditional home of the music business in the capital.

The project, dubbed Music Inc, is the brainchild of Laurence Kirschel, who has previously owned a number of music venues including Ronnie Scott's, The Rainbow, the old and new Marquee. He also developed Terrace Conran's restaurant Mezzo on Dean Street. He will submit his plans for developing the heart of London's music industry to Camden Council in the next couple of months.

"The plan is to create a completely new institution, a cultural centre for all kinds of music, including everything - folk, jazz, rock 'n' roll, reggae," said a source close to the project. "Britain makes so much good music but there is no one to develop it... It's not just a themed restaurant. It's very big and very, very expensive... It's not one of these Planet Hollywood, 'we've got a few famous names' places. We're talking about institutional names."

The source added that current music venues are badly designed, with poor facilities. Music Inc would aim to promote new bands rather than just "focusing on the golden oldies," he said. The plans include revamping Denmark Street, but the street itself is likely to remain intact. The street is part of a conservation

area with some listed buildings dating back to the 17th century.

The list of the street's past inhabitants reads like a history of rock 'n' roll. The Rolling Stones recorded "Route 66" in the then Regent Sound Studios (No 4); the Sex Pistols lived above a shop (No 6), as did the all-girl trio Bananarama; David Bowie, Ray Davies, Tom Jones and Rod Stewart used to hang out at La Gioconda, a musicians' cafe (No 9), while George Harrison, Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton and Mark Knopfler all frequented Andy's Guitar Workshop at No 27.

It was at Mills Music Ltd (No 20) that young Reg Dwight started his working life in the post room for the princely sum of £4.50 a week, before he became Elton John. And on 27 October 1969, he wrote his first hit, "Your Song", with Bernie Taupin. Paul McCartney, Sting, Status Quo and the Moody Blues bought instruments at Rose Morris Music (No 11), one of Britain's leading musical instrument stores. Preserved in concrete on the pavement outside are the handprints of Level 42 and Joan Armatrading.

Tommy Steele, Adam Faith, Cliff Richard and Petula Clark were frequent visitors at Peter Maurice Music Co, which has occupied No 21 since the 1930s. Next door, at No 22, is the UK's most famous guitar shop, Rhodes Music, patronised by the Who, Stevie Wonder and Bryan Adams. And so it goes on.

Mr Kirschel is director of Freeholder Consolidated Developments Ltd, which owns a large block of land taking in buildings between the northern end of Charing Cross Road, St Giles High Street and Denmark Street. He refused to comment on the plans "due to the sensitivity with Camden Council". Successive companies have tried and failed to develop the area, which is one of the few remaining large prime-site locations in central London.



The beat goes on: Adam Garcia, in his first West End starring role as the disco heart-throb Tony Manero, strutting his stuff with Anita Louise Corbée. Photograph: Geraint Lewis

Seventies fever is staying alive in the Nineties

By David Lister
Arts News Editor

THE Seventies revival received its biggest test last night.

Reprising on fashions and dance styles does have some sociological and historical relevance. Bringing back the Bee Gees' window-shattering falsettos is a high-risk strategy.

But the impresario Robert Stigwood, who discovered the group back in the Sixties, has kept the faith. Yesterday he opened his £4m stage musical of the 1977 hit film *Saturday Night Fever* in the West End, boasting not only all the Bee Gees' originals such as "Stayin' Alive" and "Night Fever", but also two new songs written by the group especially for this production.

Whether that brings in the crowds in 1998 remains to be seen.

The *Seventies* film made a star out of John Travolta, who, unsurprisingly, was not prepared to relive his youth on the Palladium stage.

Instead, Stigwood decided to gamble on Adam Garcia in his first West End starring role as white-suited disco heart-throb Tony Manero living for Saturday nights at the 2001 Odyssey disco, with another leading member of the cast, Simon Greiff, as Bobby C, straight out of drama school.

No risks were being taken with the choreography, which was entrusted to Arlene Phillips, the founder of the *Seventies* dance troupe Hot Gossip.

She also directed the production, and promised that she would bring out in the stage production the often forgotten "dark, racist and sexist" elements of the

FIRST NIGHT:
SATURDAY NIGHT
FEVER: LONDON
PALLADIUM

movie. She said in a recent interview that she was in no doubt of the current *Seventies* craze.

"I look at *Time Out* and every single week there's another *Seventies* club or *Seventies* night."

Why is that? "The music's good, it's energising, and everything comes round. Every era comes back."

It is 22 years since the rock journalist Nik Cohn largely invented (by his own admission) an article for *New York* magazine about working-class guys going dancing in Brooklyn.

The rights for the piece were bought by Stigwood the day the magazine appeared, and he produced a movie about it whose soundtrack sold 31 million copies.

The show's co-producer, David Ian, was one of those whose life or at least lifestyle was changed.

He says: "I was 16 or 17 when it was released and it had an enormous impact on me."

"All of a sudden, dancing was cool for guys, rather than hanging out with a pint of lager."

David Ian, Stigwood and Paul Nicholas, the production team behind *Saturday Night Fever*, also produced *Grease*, now in its fifth year in the West End and also a *Seventies* movie hit with John Travolta.

They will be hoping the formula will strike gold again... before the Eighties revival sets in.

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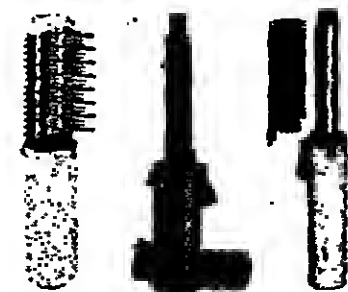
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Blair and Major set to bolster 'yes' campaign

By David McKittrick
Ireland Correspondent

IRISH REFERENDUM



THE DEBATE within the Unionist and Protestant community over the Good Friday agreement raged on yesterday with opposing factions characterising it as either the best way ahead or a constitutional calamity.

The Prime Minister, Tony Blair, is due in Belfast today, together with John Major, for a visit which the pro-agreement forces hope will galvanise a so-far lacklustre campaign leading up to the May 22nd referendum.

The "yes" campaign has to date been a quiet affair, partly because many of those in favour tend to support it not with great enthusiasm but because they feel it is the least-worst, or possibly the only option, available.

By contrast the "no" campaign, unsurprisingly for an enterprise led by the Rev Ian Paisley, has been much more conspicuous and vociferous. But although it has generated more activity it has yet to create a sense of momentum or a bandwagon effect within Unionism.

The Presbyterian church, the largest Protestant denomination in Northern Ireland, yesterday delivered a judgement on the agreement which stopped short of calling for a "yes" vote. Its detailed critique of the accord none the less applauded many parts of it, leaving the impression that the church broadly

favoured the accord. Its key sentence read: "The agreement does not represent defeat or assimilation but is rather a political accommodation which could be a way out of the darkness of the last 30 years into a better future."

On the Unionist political front the language deployed was less restrained. A loose confederation of anti-agreement elements including Mr Paisley's party, Robert McCartney's UK Unionists and dissenting members of David Trimble's Ulster Unionists, formally launched their campaign with the slogan "It's right to say no."

Mr McCartney declared: "It is a positive campaign. A 'yes' vote means the end of our link with Britain." Of Mr Trimble he said: "This man is putty in the hands of experienced negotiators."

William Ross, one of Mr

Trimble's MPs, said: "I intend to stick with this until my party comes to its senses."

A pointed rejoinder to the "no" campaign came from the Progressive Unionist Party, some of whose leading members have served prison sentences for involvement in loyalist violence.

Billy Hutchinson, a party spokesman, said: "All of those people out there in the 'no' campaign had better take responsibility. If they are going to frighten people with a united Ireland then they will be responsible for creating more deaths. Those people who say we are on a road to a united Ireland had better realise that they are making people very, very nervous and this is making people pull triggers."

Meanwhile, six republican prisoners were transferred from British to Irish jails yesterday.



Mask of division: An 'Ian Paisley' at a Sinn Féin 'Free the PoWs' rally at Crossmaglen

Photograph: Brian Harris

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No surrender to settlement in heartland of the hard-liners

By Kim Sengupta
in Portadown

THERE IS little welcome for the peace settlement at Portadown, the unyielding heartland of Ulster Protestantism. Instead, the mood among many is one of fatalism and anger. The Loyalist cause has been, they say, casually tossed away in the interest of political expediency. The view in this town, where Protestants make up 73 per cent of the population, is that decades of bombing and shooting by the Provisional IRA has ended with Sinn Féin getting what they wanted over tea and biscuits at Stormont.

Portadown is the constituency of Ulster Unionist leader, David Trimble, who is of course campaigning for a yes vote. But it is also the home town of Billy Wright, the murdered leader of the Loyalist Volunteer Force. Supporters of the paramilitary say that since the politicians have betrayed them, the only option left is relentless and violent direct action.

It is no empty threat. The Good Friday peace accord was followed by a series of sectarian attacks on Catholics, including the murders of a 29-year-old man at Portadown, and a 22-year-old student at Crumlin, Co Antrim. The security sources blamed the UVF. Portadown will also be the location of one of the most potentially explosive confrontations of the coming months, the Orange Order Drumcree march through the Catholic Garvagh Road.

Last Friday the recently instituted Parades Commission issued restrictions on two Loyalist marches. At Portadown, Protestant activists declare such interference will not be tolerated when it comes to Drumcree.

Ivor Young's rapidly growing Concerned Protestants Committee will be co-ordinating many of the planned marches and rallies of the marching season. On his front room wall hangs a sketch of Orangemen parading to Drumcree Parish Church.

Mr Young said: "We do not accept this Parades Commission, they are just representing the British Government. They have no right to tell us what to do. The people will be going to their church at Drumcree. It is not the Loyalists who cause trouble there, it is the Nationalists whipped up by Sinn Féin/IRA."

"David Trimble has let us down badly. If he stands here again, he is just one of the politicians who has sold us down the river."

"Of course there will be violence in the future. I don't think Tony Blair understands the situation: the Loyalists have been left with no option but to fight back. What he doesn't understand is that we could be seeing things which are 10 times

worse than anything that has gone on before."

In the town centre blasted last year by a 500lb IRA bomb, Richard Armstrong, 42, a company director, says he has no time for Loyalist paramilitaries but is also against the agreement.

He said: "Unlike a lot of people, I have actually studied the document. It seems to mean all things to all men. I can't see how it can work when the avowed aim of Sinn Féin is a United Ireland. If the referendum was held tomorrow I would vote no."

There were, however, a few voices of hope. Susan Johnston, 53, is at pains to point out that



'David Trimble has let us down badly. If he stands here again, I don't think he'll get back in'

people are simply too weary and battered by the years of strife. "I was so happy about the agreement at Easter that I actually got drunk for the first time in 10 years. My husband was most shocked," she said.

"This is our last chance, we have had 28 years of the troubles and it has got us nowhere. We simply do not want any more killings in the future. It's got to stop."

Whether that happens or not may well be out of the hands of people like her. Less than 200 yards from where she stood speaking, rising above the red, white and blue kerb stones of the Protestant estates are the murals mourning the martyrdom of Billy Wright, and the slogans of Loyalism's defiant last stand. "UVF - the true defenders", "No Surrender", and "Marching Not Talking - Drumcree 98."



PIN

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Push to the summit promises to take the breath away



STEPHEN GOODWIN
Everest Diary
Base Camp

THIS could be my last diary from Base Camp before our push for the 8,848m summit of Everest. The weather is still unsettled, sun in the morning and snow showers in the afternoon, but we have had a favourable forecast and Dave Walsh, our guide, is keen to move up to a higher camp to be poised should a summit opportunity arise.

Lengthy, that is diary length, communication from higher camps is unlikely. The team has VHF radios for operational and emergency use but the only diary pieces I have got down from higher up during our earlier acclimatisation climbs have been written on paper and carried down to Base Camp by a Sherpa for onward transmission by friends.

So this may be the occasion for me to talk of my hopes and fears before once again we enter the moving labyrinth of the Khumbu Icefall en route to Advanced Base Camp (Camp 2). Hopes are simple, I would like to get as high as possible consistent with getting down safely. Unlike my team-mates on this commercial expedition, marketed by Himalayan Kingdoms Expeditions of Sheffield, I have not personally invested £25,000 to £30,000 in attempting to climb to the top of the world, and I have no flag to wave.

I feel some sympathy for Josie Kieran, the 44-year old nurse from Dundalk, who is carrying an Irish flag presented to her by the president, Mary McAleese.

Josie would be the first Irish woman to the summit. Though she would probably brush aside my concern that the "flag and the first" are potentially dangerous pressures - liable to push one beyond a point of safe return - history suggests it is real enough. Flags and nationalism have been a bane of mountaineering.



Dear Diary: Stephen Goodwin at Base Camp yesterday preparing for the summit assault. Photograph: Sundee Dhillon using a Fuji DS-300 digital camera

that may linger in some minds. Everest expeditions do not advance up the mountain with the lightly laden sahibs followed Indian-style by bow-backed Sherpas, cooks and cook boys. On the mountain, we hardly ever see our Sherpas, except coming in the opposite direction. Both groups carry out their tasks independently.

Sherpas these days are analogous to jobbing builders. You employ them, but they will have their own fixed ideas about how best to do the job and when they will turn up or knock off for tea.

Unfortunately our Sherpas seem to have decided not all the team will get high on Everest and therefore, contrary to instructions, they did not need to put up another tent at Camp 3 where last month we crammed three people into each of two cosy two-man tents.

The job should have been done days ago while we were away down the valley in Dingboche. Dave Walsh will now have to insist on another tent, but the Sherpas' belligerence does not augur well for the vitally necessary co-operation we will need at the South Col and above.

A signal difference, of course, between the 1953-type expedition and commercial ventures such as ours is over the selection of summiteers. Hunt, or Chris Bonington in his big 1970s climbs, could pick the strongest pair for the summit bid and the rest of the party would have to be content with some reflected glory as part of the team.

On a commercial trip, once the punter has paid his or her £25,000, he or she must feel entitled to an equal shot at the summit, no matter how illusory, or even dangerous, the guides - or Sherpas - may feel this is.

For Josie, more hillwalker than climber, it is going to be a testing few days. So I have fears for my team-mates, all of whom have more invested in the summit, financially and emotionally, than I do.

This morning, before breakfast, I lay in my sleeping bag and re-read Sir Edmund Hillary's account of reaching the summit with Sherpa Tenzing Norgay in 1953 - the first

ascent. What comes through is the sheer physically wearying ordeal of it - even for a supremely fit man, as the big New Zealander certainly was at the time.

I am no Hillary and exhaustion is one of my fears. Going up the Lhotse Face to Camp 3 at 7,200m was sapping enough. This time we will have bottled oxygen from then on. But I will have to carry two bot-

ties on my back and what if the Russian-made system malfunctions or freezes in the bitter cold?

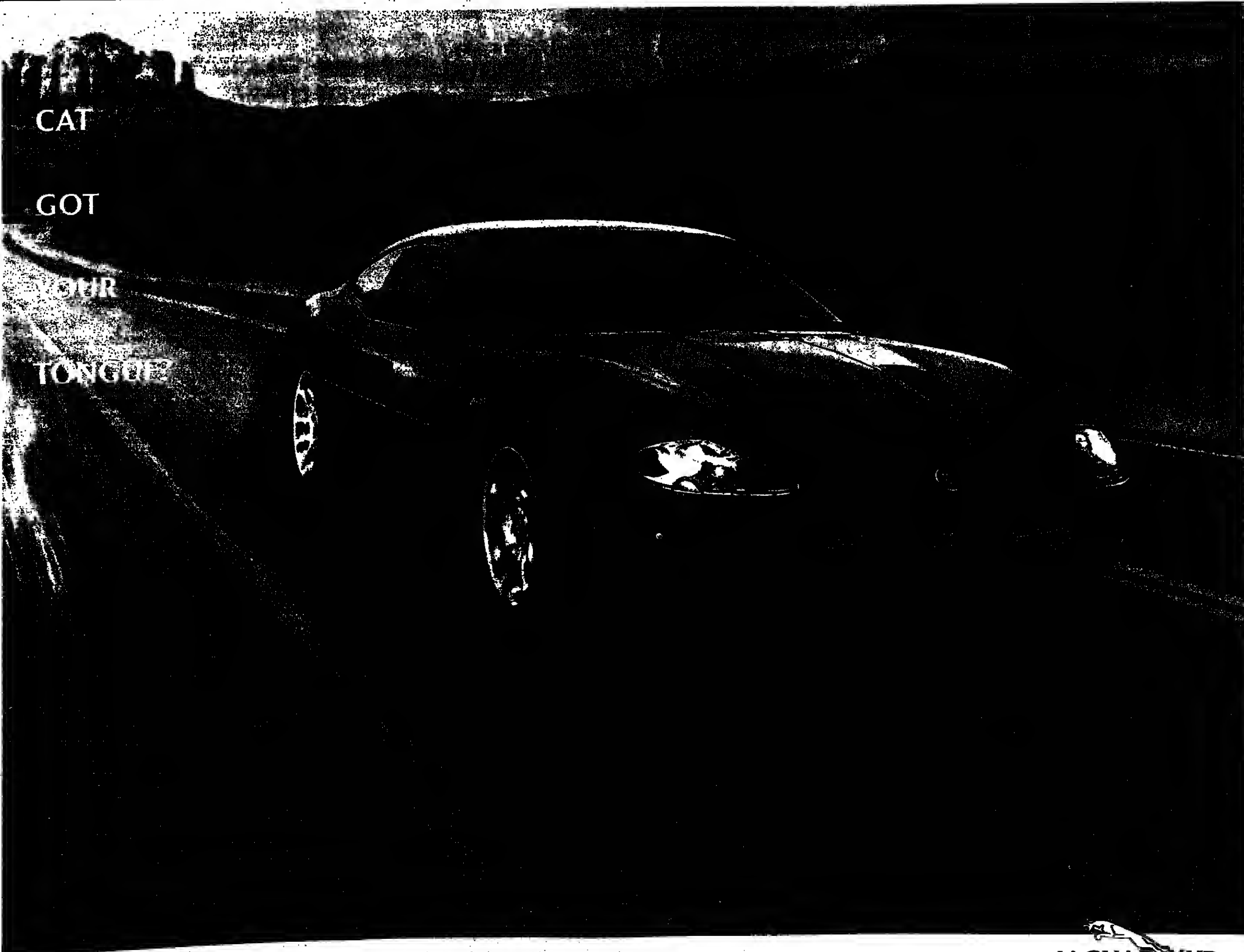
So far I have coped pretty well with altitude and have had no bad headaches. We have done all the right things about acclimatising slowly - goodness, we have been in Nepal for nearly seven weeks. So maybe I am being irrational, but even so the possibility of serious altitude

sickness striking suddenly, and my not being able to descend quickly to relieve it, is perhaps my biggest fear.

Another nagging worry around the camp, certainly among the clients, is how closely engaged the Sherpas are in our enterprise. John Hunt is unstinting in his praise for the Sherpas' "magnificent" effort in 1953 and their co-operation in the essential teamwork of the whole party.

Well our nine Sherpas seem a friendly, cheerful enough bunch but I suspect the idea of teamwork and joint enterprise has faded since 1953. It is hardly surprising. Everest climbing is business. Just as we are a commercial expedition, Sherpas are contractors, doing a job for a price and often in a manner they themselves largely dictate.

Perhaps I should dispel a myth



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Arafat fights last-ditch battle for his health

By Patrick Cockburn
Jerusalem

HOW sick is Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader? For several years his visitors have noticed he sometimes tucks his hands under his legs when he is sitting down to conceal the fact that they are shaking. Diplomats have seen him taking pills prescribed by his doctors, but do not know details of his medication.

At one moment, Israel set up an informal committee to advise on the state of Mr Arafat's health. It decided he did not have Parkinson's disease, though he does have many of the symptoms, such as shaking limbs and lips and fixed eyes.

His closest aides are protective. They say many of the signs of his deteriorating health

are the consequence of his plane crash in Libya on 7 April 1992.

Several months after the crash doctors in Jordan removed a blood clot in his brain, an apparent result of the crash landing.

Mr Arafat is 69 and works famously hard, particularly at night. Few decisions to the Palestinian Authority, which runs Gaza and the Palestinian enclaves on the West Bank, are reached without him.

But since Benjamin Netanyahu was elected Israeli prime minister in 1996 the Palestinian leader has been depressed – his depression sometimes coming close to a nervous breakdown.

He speaks less in English than he used to, and his aides seem to coach him more.



Yasser Arafat in London yesterday after meeting Tony Blair. Observers have commented on the Palestinian leader's sickly appearance.

Photograph: Paul Hackett

Since Netanyahu was elected, the Palestinian leader has suffered serious depression

But there are few signs that Mr Arafat's memory is fading. He is as deft as ever in manoeuvring within Palestinian politics as was demonstrated during the latest crisis in

relations with the Islamic militant group Hamas. His political problems have more to do with Mr Netanyahu's intransigence. The Israeli leader is prepared to talk at almost

any length about the Oslo accord, but not to implement it.

Nevertheless, the Palestinian leader is sticking to his strategy of trying to cultivate American, European and Arab

support in order to put pressure on Israel. He has steered away from suggestions that the Palestinians need to prove on the streets that they will not accept the present status quo.

If Mr Arafat dies, Abu Mazen, who negotiated so much of the Oslo agreement, is his most obvious successor. But whoever takes over will depend on the Palestinian security

services. He will also lack Mr Arafat's popular appeal among the 6 million Palestinians in the world and his reputation as an old revolutionary, as well as a diplomat.

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Albright shows her fear of Netanyahu

By Robert Fisk
Middle East Correspondent

THERE was a moment yesterday morning that captured the hopelessness of the Middle East "peace process". On a sofa just outside the coffee saloon of the Churchill Hotel in London there slumped a familiar figure. There was no obvious security, just a tall, State Department spokesman and the woman sitting white-faced with exhaustion on the settee. Madeleine Albright looked like she was on the point of collapse.

Only hours before, she had telephoned Yasser Arafat to plead her excuses. She could not come to see him as agreed, she said. She was simply too tired to drive over to Claridges for their meeting. Arafat burst into laughter when the call was over.

Never mind that his own state of health – shocking to behold when only a few feet from him – was far worse than Mrs Albright's. But when it came to Benjamin Netanyahu, a few hours later, Mrs Albright was off in her limousine to meet the Israeli Prime Minister at his hotel.

And what came over most strongly yesterday was Mrs Albright's fear of Mr Netanyahu, indeed perhaps her fear of Israel. Mr Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organisation had already accepted America's conditions for the 11 May invitation to meet President Bill Clinton in Washington. Mr Netanyahu had not responded. He was flying back to Israel to consult his cabinet. But when Mrs Albright talked to us later – hesitant and sometimes confusing or forgetting questions – she was all praise for the Israeli Prime Minister who is forging ahead with Jewish settlements on the land Mr Arafat wants as part of his Palestinian state.

Mr Netanyahu, we heard, was encouraging. He had produced "new ideas". He was enthusiastic. He was "helpful". She was very grateful to Mr Netanyahu. As for Israel's security demands – which now include a decrease in the number of Mr Arafat's policemen – "it is obviously up to Israel to decide what its security demands are ..."

But that was the whole point. Since Israel, on "security" grounds, is still refusing to give up more than 9 per cent of occupied land – an odd 11 per cent figure surfaced during the day although the Israelis would not officially confirm it – this effectively gave Israel the right to decide on the size of its withdrawals.

When we asked Mrs Albright what all those new ideas were – what possible progress she could be talking about after two days in which Mr Netanyahu and Mr Arafat couldn't even bring themselves to talk to each other on the telephone – we were informed that "more details do not help us to move forward". It was an odd phrase:

– but not as surprising as the admission that US proposals for Washington talks included an immediate move to what in the Oslo agreement are called "final status talks" – something that Mr Netanyahu has been demanding for the past 12 months.

So what did this mean? According to Mrs Albright, an "accelerated peace process". But a glance at the Oslo treaty shows that it would probably allow Israel to stall on any further withdrawals – or reduce the amount of occupied Arab land it was prepared to evacuate to a mere 25 per cent, if that. And Mr Arafat is not going to get a



Benjamin Netanyahu: No sign of his 'new ideas'

Palestinian state on this little rump of territory, carved up as it already is by roads exclusively for the use of Jewish settlers.

Yet still Mrs Albright talked of progress – she used the word at least 18 times in just a few minutes. And so did Tony Blair an hour earlier. Only Mr Arafat, partly stooped as he stood outside 10 Downing Street, gave any clue to the fantasy world in which the negotiators were immersing themselves. He had "heard" from Mrs Albright, he said, that there had been "some progress" and he would go wherever necessary to save peace.

It was when I asked him if he did not now regret signing the Oslo agreement with Israel that the old man's eyes suddenly widened and his voice took on its old strength. "The peace agreement I signed was the peace of the brave," he replied. "I signed with my partners Yitzhak Rabin, who paid with his life for this peace. It is our firm duty that we continue with the just endeavour we signed with Mr Rabin and Peres."

There was deliberately no mention of Mr Netanyahu. Indeed, in none of the sound-bites he uttered yesterday did the Israeli leader come close to Mr Arafat's albeit familiar promise. Nor did Mrs Albright. She remarked of America's peace-making efforts that "it's up to the parties [to decide] as to whether we are serving the vegetables well." Perhaps that will be written on Oslo's tombstone. By contrast, Mr Arafat was momentarily in Jefferson mode.

Leading article, page 20

هكذا من الأصل

After the tiff, euro partners prepare to kiss and make up

French and German views on the row over the central bank chief are poles apart. John Lichfield reports from Paris and Imre Karacs from Bonn



Friends together: Chirac and Kohl will make a public display of accord Photograph: Reuters

The Franco-German partnership remains an immovable feature of the domestic, political landscape in both countries. The fundamentals have not changed. Both countries are inescapably committed to the EU and therefore to one another. The advent of the euro, arguably, condemns Paris and Bonn to get on more than ever before. But there is a difference between rubbing along, with periodic bursts of tension, and getting on well. How effectively Paris and Bonn work together is crucial to a series of decisions in the next few years on the running of the single currency and enlargement of the EU to the east (potentially the biggest of all sources of Franco-German tension). It will, it seems, be up to a new generation of politicians to solve this puzzle.

One lesson is that the French establishment has written off Mr Kohl. Mr Chirac calculated he had no need to please the old man any more. Almost exactly a year after Mr Chirac shot himself in the foot by calling an early general election, the French (Socialist) European Affairs Minister, Pierre Moscovici, is reported to have commented, snidely: "Chirac put the left in power in France in 1997; he's going to put the social democrats in power in Germany in 1998."

AVIGNON, famously, has a bridge which reaches only half-way across the river. It may provide a suitable metaphor for the state of Franco-German relations when leaders of the two countries meet in the beautiful town on the Rhône delta today.

The timing of the summit, four days after the unpleasant French-German quarrel around the cradle of the newly born euro, is either fortunate or unfortunate. The great likelihood is that President Jacques Chirac and Chancellor Helmut Kohl will seize the opportunity to give a public display of friendship and understanding (falling just short of dancing *en rond* on the bridge itself). It is in the interests of both men and both countries to do so: there is, in any case, nothing pressing left for them to quarrel about. The question remains: just how much damage was done to the Franco-German alliance – the foundation-stone of the European Union – by the weekend squabble?

Some French commentators have slated Mr Chirac for behaving in such a British way and holding the rest of the EU to ransom over a point of detail. Most have brushed off the affair as the usual unseemly haggling and shrieking which accompanies any great decision in the EU. The fact that the incident has been treated relatively lightly in France, and

with great fury and indignation in Germany, is itself part of the story: the two countries may be inescapably allies but they seem no longer to understand one another very well.

It was important for Mr Chirac to impose the French banker, Jean-Claude Trichet, as eventual head of the European central bank, for personal-political reasons, more than national-political reasons. Mr Trichet is, in truth, disliked by French politicians, including Mr Chirac, because he is seen as too German, too much of a pin-striped banker, too much of a strong-currency man.

It was inevitable that German, and British, commentators would see this as a French attempt to make the bank more political and more biddable. Under Mr Trichet, this is unlikely. It is significant that the markets, despite doomsday predictions from British Euro-sceptics, have taken a relaxed view of the weekend's brawl. The markets seem to be saying it does not make a blind bit of difference whether Mr Trichet or Dutch banker Wim Duisenberg is head of the European central bank. Why did the French President make such a fuss?

Mostly personal pride and stubbornness. Mr Chirac's point was mostly to win a rare, personal point (as a lame-duck right-wing President, having to live with a left-of-centre government); and partly to assert the ultimate right of politicians, and of France, to influence such appointments.

But was that worth such grief? In the French view, some of the German emotion has been cranked up for the voters. But why, then, did the divided French give such pain to Chan-

cellor Kohl, France's greatest ally and friend, in the run-up to the most difficult election of his career? The truth is that, emotionally, the French-German relationship is not as solid as it was. A new generation of politicians in both countries – even Mr Chirac, who was 13 in 1945 – are not so preoccupied by the war. There is no personal relationship between Paris and Bonn to match the genuine warmth and understanding of Mitterrand-Kohl in the 1980s or Giscard-Schmidt in the 1970s.



Small world: Japanese celebrate Children's Day yesterday at the Fuji Gulliver Kingdom park at Kamikuihiki, north-west of Tokyo Photograph: Ituo Inouye/AP

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Kohl squirms in face of bankers' gloomy verdict

BONN — At what age are international statesmen over the hill? Helmut Kohl, 68 years young and fresh from a slimming course, is trying to persuade German voters he has another four years in him. Wim Duisenberg, in contrast, is an emaciated 62-year-old who clearly could not be expected to soldier on for eight years as head of the European Central Bank.

This, in essence, is the disingenuous line the German Chancellor has found himself selling since his return from Brussels. He was, he admitted, "extremely annoyed" with the horse-trading but did not consider the outcome disonourable. Election posters saluting the "stable euro" under Mr Kohl's benevolent gaze were still prominently displayed outside Christian Democrat headquarters yesterday.

The "little family row" in Brussels, a senior CDU politician predicted, would be forgotten, perhaps, in five years. In the interim, the party must fight an uphill election battle on the EMU "achievement" without drawing too much attention to the humiliation just meted out to its chief architect.

"Helmut Kohl has certainly been damaged by this," admitted Theo Waigel, the Finance Minister. Though the money markets took the débâcle in their stride, Germany's angst-ridden money-men are despondent.

"The government heads have already named the successor [to Duisenberg] and this is a breach of the [Maastricht] Treaty," lamented Klaus-Dieter Kühnacker, a member of the all-powerful Bundesbank Council. "The next breach of the treaty is pre-programmed."

When the Bundesbank worries, German voters reach for the Prozac. It matters little what currency traders do be-

tween now and September, when the Chancellor goes to the country for a fifth term. The impression that he allowed himself to be bulldozed aside by the French President will certainly linger till election day.

It is with this in mind that the Chancellor must defend himself today in front of an emergency debate in the Bundestag, and then put on his smiling face for the meeting in Avignon with Brother Jacques. Another family squabble can, perhaps, be concealed this time from peeping neighbours, but the damage has been done.

The minority of the German media that remain loyal to Mr Kohl speak of "long-term scars" to the special relationship between France and Germany.

Francophiles in the Chancellor's entourage feel betrayed: the strategy of a common front with France on all major issues of European integration has been fatally undermined by the French.

The mighty Bundesbank, which has grudgingly turned a blind eye to French accounting tricks in the past, will not forget this. Frankfurt as well as the politicians on both sides of Bonn's parliamentary divide blame President Chirac, and are openly contemptuous of his "pursuit of French national interests at all cost".

How Chancellor Kohl feels about the weekend's events is somewhat less relevant, given the prospect of his imminent retirement, thanks partly to his friends in Paris. But the high-handed way in which he was treated at the weekend is seen as an affront to all of Germany: a grudge to be borne by his successors.

The infamy of Brussels is thus set to mark a turning-point. The Franco-German axis, more of a myth than a fact since the departure of François Mitterrand, is about to snap.



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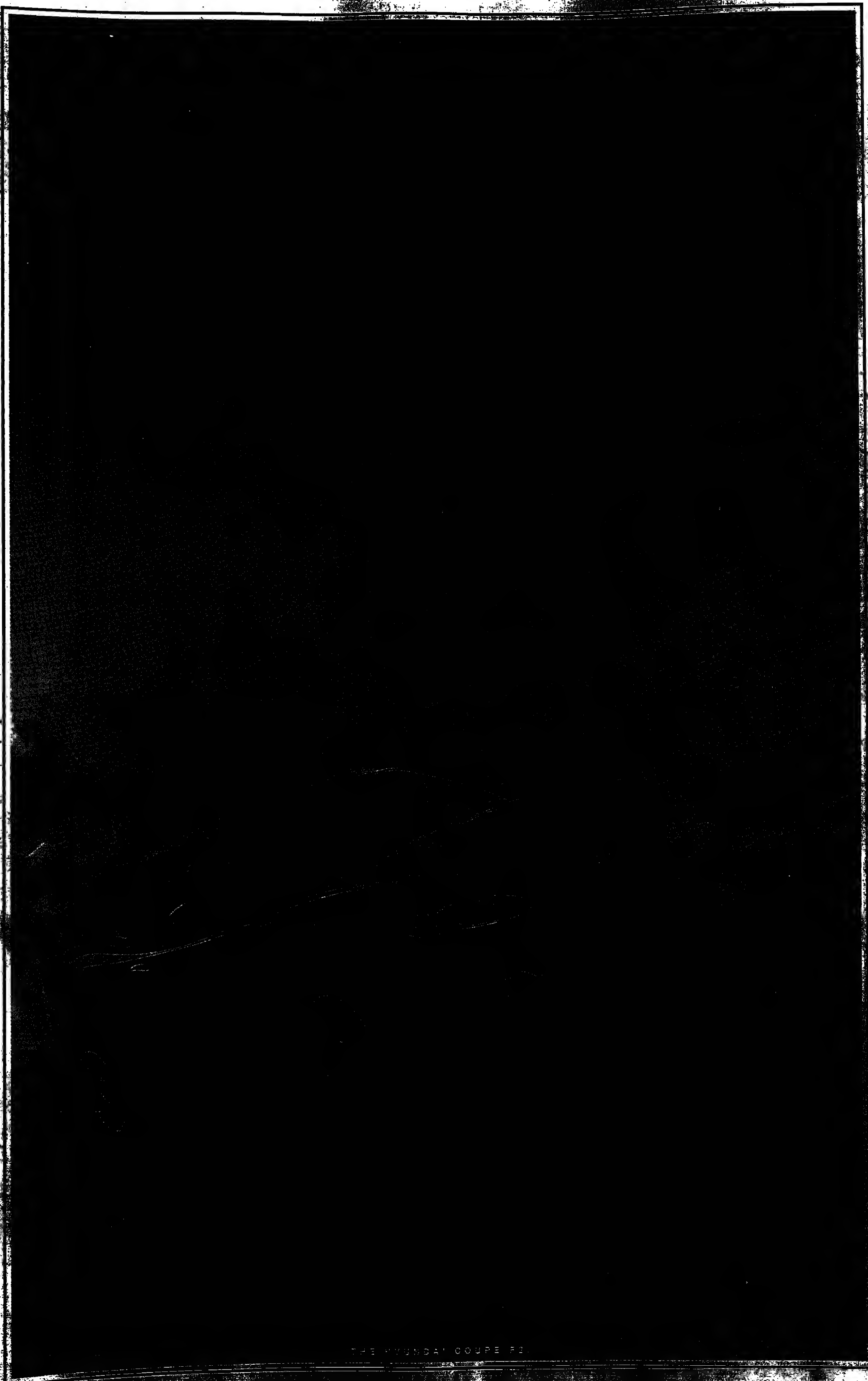
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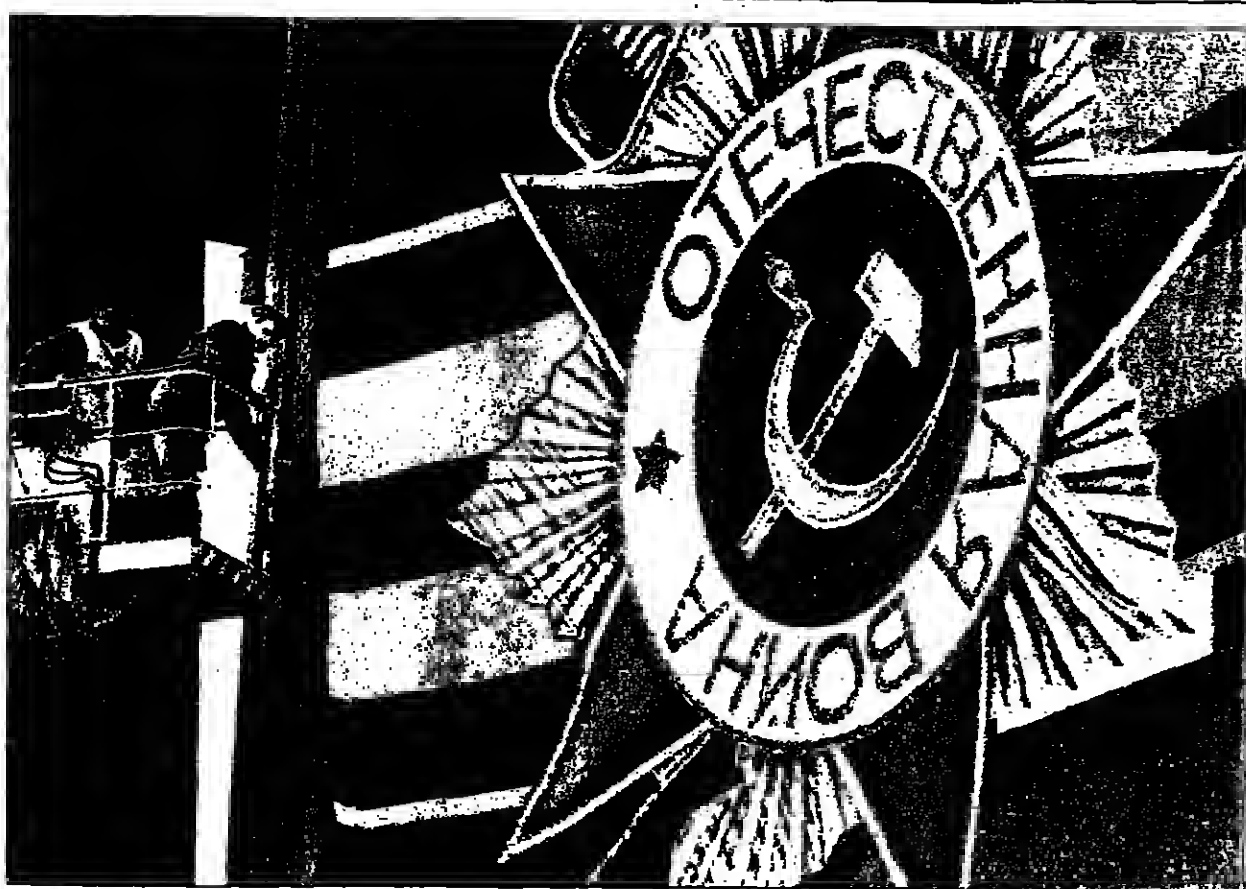
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THE HYUNDAI COUPE P3



Setting up: Workers fix a poster showing a giant Order of the Patriotic War (Second World War) on the colonnade in central St Petersburg in preparation for the Victory Day celebrations on Saturday
EPA/Anatoly Maltsev

SA rugby on brink of boycott over race row

By Mary Braid
in Johannesburg

PRESSURE is mounting for the resignation today of South Africa's rugby supremo, Louis Luyt, 24 hours before an ultimatum runs out for him to stand down or face an international boycott which could cripple the sport.

"Big Louis", the bluff, controversial president of the South African Rugby Football Union (SARFU), is accused of presiding over a game tarnished by racism, nepotism, mismanagement and financial irregularities. He resisted attempts by President Nelson Mandela to launch an inquiry into the allegations against rugby, which Mr Luyt's critics claim he runs as if it were his fiefdom. Four years ago rugby, a near-religion for many Afrikaners and often an excuse

for displays of racism and right-wing political sentiment during the apartheid era, was heralded by Mr Mandela as a sport which yet had the power to help rebuild the nation.

Today there are still no black players in the national team and only five non-whites among more than 100 players in the Super 12 competition. The rugby establishment is accused of doing nothing to take the game to the townships. Racism allegations were not helped by the resignation last year of Andre Markgraaff the national coach, after he was recorded referring to black rugby officials as "kaffirs". Last month a South African player was sent home from a tour of New Zealand after calling a black South African female fan a "kaffir".

The National Sports Council issued its boycott threat last



Luyt: A regime tainted by claims of racism and graft

month after Mr Mandela was forced to defend his political decision in court, when SARFU challenged his right to launch an inquiry. The Sports Council accused Mr Luyt of "humiliating" the President and demanded his resignation, along with his entire executive. A successful boycott would make the South African rugby team pariahs again.

Neither the Sports Council nor Mr Luyt is budging. Yesterday the Natal Rugby Union called for him to take voluntary redundancy for the good of the game.

Muleki George, the Sports Council president, suggested Mr Luyt's resignation alone might be sufficient to avert the boycott but warned that if he did not go, a ban on international games would come into operation by the end of the month. The first casualty would be the Irish tour due this month.

Yesterday the Sports Council was lobbying the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) to back the boycott, already blessed by the Sports Minister, Steve Tshwete, and is believed to have the support of Mr Mandela's cabinet, which might soon be notifying foreign governments that their rugby teams are not welcome in South Africa.

Cosatu yesterday called for the resignation of William de Villiers, the judge who ordered Mr Mandela to appear in court and who ruled two weeks ago that the government had no right to investigate SARFU.

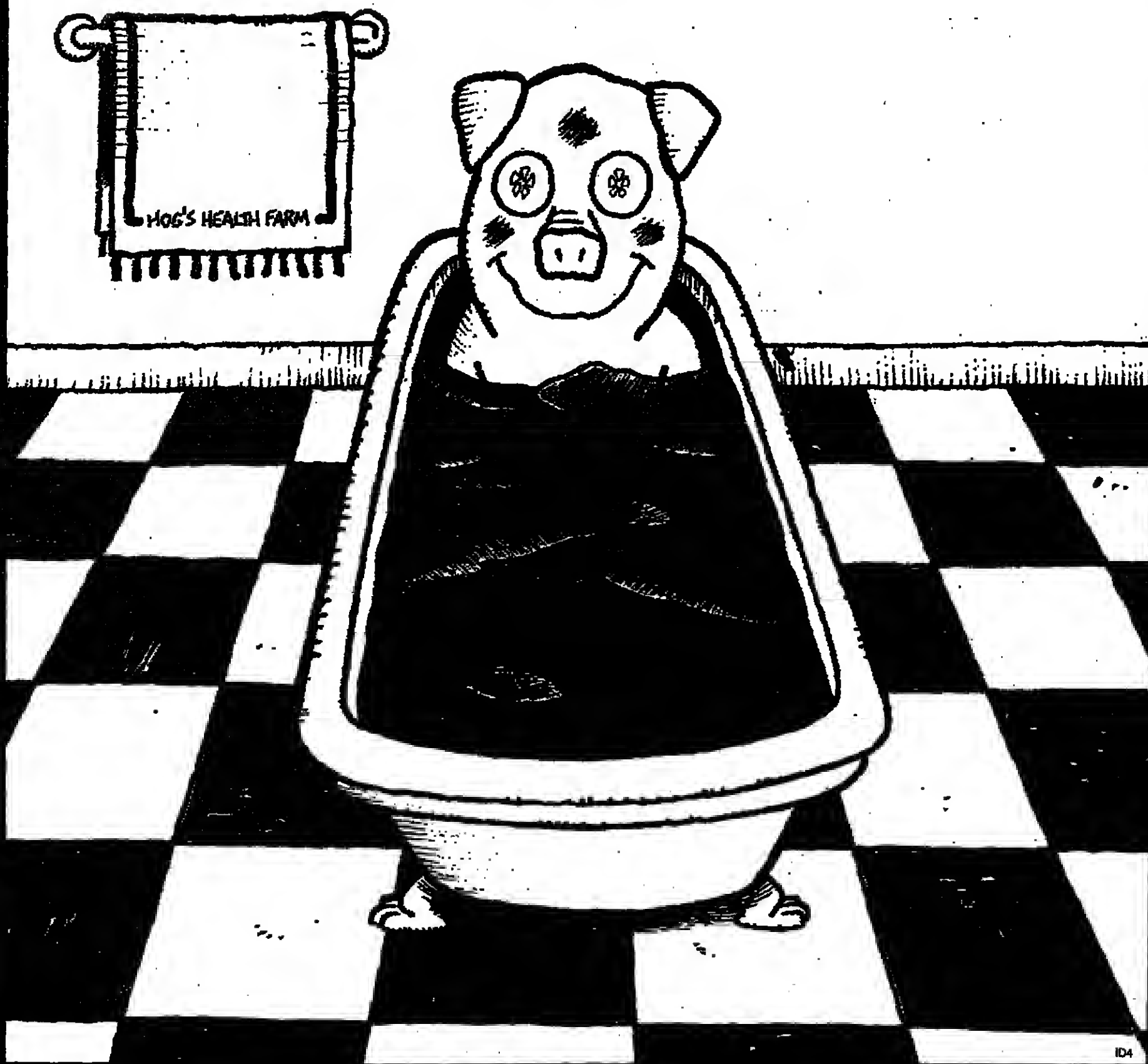
He has yet to give his reasons for the ruling. A Cosatu spokesman criticised the judge for calling the President in court and said he was treating Mr Mandela and the country with contempt by delaying the reasons for his judgement. Rugby experts and sponsors, who have also called on Mr Luyt to go, say disaster looms and not just in South Africa. Australian and New Zealand rugby officials said the dispute between SARFU and the government could force cancellation of this year's lucrative Tri-nations series.

Yesterday a phone conference between rugby officials from all three countries was cancelled at the last minute. "We decided ... to wait and see how things unfold," said Dick McGruther, the Australian Rugby Union (ARU) chairman. "It's a South African problem that we are confident they will be able to resolve and we wanted to allow them that opportunity before we get involved."

He said the ARU would discuss the matter with the Australian government before deciding what further action to take. During the court case, sponsors warned that even if Mr Luyt won the legal battle he would lose the wider war.

Mr Luyt, it seems, is the last to accept the inevitable. The rugby writer Barry Glasspool said yesterday that even by his own stubborn standards, Mr Luyt's stand was "breathtaking". Glasspool said it was inconceivable the NSC would back down now. Whatever Mr Luyt believed, "rugby cannot operate without harmonious relations with the government and the Sports Council."

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Croat death camp chief to face court

By Phil Davison
Latin America Correspondent

IT WAS more than half a century later and a continent away but Dinko Sakic's leer was the same. His alleged victims - Jews, Serbs and gypsies - went to their deaths watching that same twisted smile on the face of their concentration camp commander.

As his neighbours booed and jeered, Sakic, 76, pulled the derisory smile for photographers in Argentina when he was arrested last week on suspicion of war crimes. He is expected to be extradited to his native Croatia shortly to face trial in connection with tens of thousands of deaths at the notorious Jasenovac concentration camp.

Sakic admits he ran Jasenovac but insists that no one was exterminated and that the victims merely fell sick. "They died from an epidemic of typhoid. There were no cremation ovens," he stated. His lawyer said he would not fight extradition and would base his defence on the epidemic argument.

His wife, Nada, also said by Holocaust survivors to have taken part in exterminations, has not been detained by the Argentinians.

Sakic and his wife had lived unnoticed in Argentina for 51 years but he stunned his neighbours in the Atlantic coastal resort of Santa Teresita last month by revealing his fascist past in a television interview. He said for the first time that he had been commander of Jasenovac, about 50 miles south of the Croatian capital Zagreb from 1942 until 1944, when Croatia



Dinko Sakic: Ran camp at Jasenovac during WW2

was a Nazi puppet state set up by Hitler as a buffer against communism.

Under pressure from his country's powerful Jewish community, who have criticised the presence of ex-Nazis in the past, the Argentinian President, Carlos Menem ordered his arrest.

Croatia admits that tens of thousands of Serbs, Jews and gypsies were exterminated at Jasenovac. But Serbs, Jewish groups and many historians say the figure was in the hundreds of thousands, and was comparable to Hitler's own concentration camps inside Germany and Nazi-occupied territory.

Sakic was 21 when he took control of Jasenovac in 1942 under the Nazi-backed Ustashe government of Croatia. He also oversaw another concentration camp at Stara Gradiska, south-east of Zagreb. After the war and the triumph of Tito's communists in Yugoslavia he first received shelter in Franco's Spain before fleeing to Argentina in 1947.



هكذا من الأصل

First Lady escapes criminal indictment

By Mary Dejevsky
in Washington

HILLARY CLINTON, who set a dubious precedent for First Ladies when she was summoned for questioning by state prosecutors last year, will not be indicted for any criminal offence, it was confirmed yesterday – at least not yet.

Mrs Clinton had been questioned six times in the labyrinthine Whitewater investigation, most recently 10 days ago when her evidence was videotaped for presentation to the grand jury.

Lawyers close to the investigation stressed, however, that some of the evidence gathered during the Whitewater inquiry could be submitted to the two other grand juries currently investigating alleged wrongdoing by the Clintons. One is considering the First Lady's involvement in dismissing members of the White House travel office and the possible misuse by the White House of FBI files; the other – whether Mr Clinton may have had an affair with a White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, and induced her to lie about it under oath.

The allegations against Mrs Clinton concentrated on legal work she transacted for a failed Arkansas bank more than a decade ago. She was then a partner in the Rose law firm and her husband was state governor.

The Clintons had invested in the speculative development project known as Whitewater, which was backed by the bank. They were suspected of abusing their influence to benefit themselves and their associates – even though the project failed and the Clintons say they lost money. That Mrs Clinton would not be indicted had been forecast with increasing confidence in Washington in recent weeks as the Arkansas grand jury approached the end of its mandate. Legal specialists agreed the indictment of a First Lady was unlikely without conclusive evidence of criminal activity.

The judicial shadow that has hung over Mrs Clinton for much of her husband's presidency has thus been lifted. Other Clinton associates have been

less fortunate. The Clintons' former business partner, Susan McDougal, became the last person to be indicted in connection with Whitewater on Monday, when she was charged on three counts of refusing to testify and obstructing justice. Mrs McDougal has already spent 18 months in prison for civil contempt for refusing to testify. She claims independent prosecutor Kenneth Starr has put pressure on her to implicate Mrs Clinton.

The other, Webster Hubbell, a former partner – with Mrs Clinton – in the Rose law firm and former number three at the US Justice Department, has also been indicted on multiple counts of tax evasion and fraud. Mr Hubbell, who has already served an 18-month sentence for fraud in connection with Whitewater, says he regards the new charges as a fresh attempt by Mr Starr to extract incriminating evidence from him against Mrs Clinton.

Mr Hubbell subsequently found himself at the centre of a feverish bout of Washington political in-fighting over taped conversations between himself and his wife while he was in jail. These suggested Mr Hubbell might know more about Hillary Clinton's legal work in Arkansas than he had divulged. Late on Monday, amid an outcry from Democrats, the full tapes were released, which showed Mr Hubbell specifically absolving Mrs Clinton.

While Mrs Clinton might be in the clear over Whitewater, neither she nor President Clinton are out of the woods yet. As if reasserting his authority, Mr Starr yesterday called Vernon Jordan, an influential black businessman and presidential confidante, to testify for the third time before the Washington grand jury in the Lewinsky case. Mr Clinton's private secretary, Betty Curry, is also expected to be re-called. Both are suspected of concealing what they know about the relationship between Mr Clinton and Ms Lewinsky, in particular whether Ms Lewinsky's silence may have been "bought" by a well-paying private-sector job arranged for her by Mr Jordan.



Students and police clash during protests yesterday in Java against President Suharto

Photograph: Reuters

Indonesia police fire on rioters

By Stephen Vines

SERIOUS rioting has broken out in the Indonesian city of Medan in which the police have fired live bullets at demonstrators. It is the first time police have taken such measures since civil unrest erupted this year in response to the country's economic austerity programme.

There were reports that several protesters were injured by bullets as rioting spilled onto the town's main highway. An angry crowd is also said to have torched a police station. Thousands of rioters also looted Chinese-owned stores in Medan.

Previously most protests in the Sumatran capital were confined to students but a police spokesman said yesterday: "It's not a pure student protest anymore, because it involves ordinary people."

There are thousands of angry people trying to burn houses. They are burning tyres and turning over cars."

To the Indonesian capital Jakarta there was more violence as students called for the removal of President Suharto. Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas canisters to disperse the crowd. At least five police officers and 25 students are reported to have been injured. There were also clashes between students and police in Bandung, Java.

The latest protests emerged after the government moved to implement austerity measures demanded by the International Monetary Fund in return for a \$43bn bailout of the failing economy. Petrol prices have risen 71 per cent and kerosene, used as a cooking fuel by the poor, rose 25 per cent as a result of the end of government subsidies.

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Israelis accused of shooting at Palestinian reporters

ISRAELI soldiers have been deliberately firing on Palestinian journalists covering unrest in the occupied territories, according to a report by the French-based Reporters sans Frontières. RSF, which defends press freedom worldwide, says 25 journalists have been wounded in this way in the past 18 months. In the most recent incident, eight journalists were wounded by rubber bullets fired by Israeli soldiers while covering demonstrations in Hebron on 13 March. RSF says that it is extremely concerned about the increase in violent acts by the Israeli army against journalists in the occupied territories and called on the government to open an inquiry.

Austria marks Holocaust

FOR the first time, Austria yesterday honoured victims of the Holocaust with a national day of remembrance. A solemn, nationally televised sitting of both houses of parliament and a performance of "The Diary of Anne Frank," written by the Russian Jewish composer Grigory Fried and sung by a young Israeli soprano, formed the highlight of several commemorations. — AP, Vienna

Serbs warn of Kosovo war

A LEADING Serb official in Kosovo warned international powers to pressure ethnic Albanians to give up their goal of independence, or face the threat of a wider Balkan war. Veljko Odalovic, the deputy director of the Kosovo Serb government, said that such pressure "would solve many of the problems" in Serbia's ethnic Albanian-dominated Kosovo province. The warning came amid reports that Albanian militants killed two more people and were battling Serbian police near Kosovo's border with Albania for the third consecutive day. — AP, Pristina

Barrier Reef faces ruin

AUSTRALIA'S Great Barrier Reef appears to be experiencing its worst case of coral bleaching. Australian marine scientists say it has hit more than 60 per cent of 3,000 coral reefs on the country's north-east coast. The bleaching is caused by rising sea temperatures and freshwater flooding. The Great Barrier Reef is the largest marine park in the world and is home to more than 300 species of coral, 4,000 shell molluscs, 1,500 species of fish and several endangered species, including dugongs and loggerhead turtles. — Reuters, Sydney

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OVER

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How the wild West End will be won

'Rent' has reinvented the musical on Broadway. Can an HIV rock opera do the same here?
By David Benedict

THERE are no two ways about it. *Rent* came as bolt out of the blue. A contemporary rock opera in which *La Bohème* meets HIV was no-one's idea of a smash-hit, but at its explosive Broadway opening two years ago, *Rent* was hailed as having single-handedly reinvented the musical for a whole new generation. It won everything in sight, including the Pulitzer prize; it's still doing 100 per cent business despite a top price of \$80; and on Tuesday it opens at London's Shaftesbury Theatre.

There are a hundred and one local factors from subject matter – love in the time of Aids – to its milieu – grungy East Village types struggling with the art vs money conundrum – which explain the show's monster success, but will it travel? "Hey!", laughs Jeffrey Seller, its young, excitable and, presumably, now wealthy producer. "I feel like there's a referendum going on here. Will *Rent* work in London?"

Well, will it? There's solid insurance up front with four of the show's original leads reprising their roles, but variations on Shaw's "two nations divided by a common language" can be heard resounding around the industry. At its simplest, *Rent*, the creation of the late composer, writer and lyricist Jonathan Larson, follows a year in the life of three young couples who fall in and out of love. So what's the problem? Take a look at the context. The easy mix of race, gender and sexuality springs naturally from the world in which it was created, but that's a long way from London's West End. Similarly, Larson's reimagining of, say, Puccini's tubercular heroine Mimì as an HIV-positive drug-user reflects the horrific incidence of HIV infection in Manhattan but thus far, for many people, London's rate of infection just doesn't have the same urgency.

Conversely, Seller can take solace from the fact that the West End has lately grown more adventurous. *Trainspotting*, *Papercut* and notably *Shopping and Fucking* have confounded expectations by not only enjoying almost indecently healthy runs, but also attracting an adventurous new young audience into the theatrical heartland. As in New York, he's courting that crowd with a youth-orientated marketing campaign (the posters don't even say it's a musical) and £10 day tickets for anyone who wants to queue for

front row seats. A West End cinema ticket can cost about that.

With successful previews behind him – "I'm hearing whistling and laughter and thunderous applause seven or eight times a night – he brims with confidence, believing that the show's relationships win over audiences, even those to whom the plot elements might seem foreign.

He cites the three versions currently touring the USA and Canada. "In Dallas, Texas, which is the hotbed of what we might call conservative, right-wing attitudes, we sold out. That wasn't because of the racial mix, HIV or the bohemianism. We win them over with heart. Ultimately, it's a story about young people trying to realise their version of the American Dream, and trying to figure out how to love and connect. Getting together and breaking up, we all know about that."

The British production is acknowledged to be a risk, but Seller has gambled before and won. In 1990 he was a booker for tours of everything from the Flying Karamazov Brothers and David Copperfield to *Top of the Pops* on the roof. He was 25, stuck in middle-management and bored. "It's fair to say," he announces proudly, "that I hated my job." He filled his spare time working on off-off-Broadway shows with

friends, one of whom invited him to see a try-out of a rock monologue by someone no-one had ever heard of.

"There's this rock band on stage and out comes this tall, lanky guy with curly hair named Jonathan Larson who launches into the story of him showing up at his surprise birthday party and facing the fact that he's 30, broke, his bathtub's in the kitchen, his friends are moving into more fancy apartments and he's still working

in a diner and nobody wants to produce his musicals. Should he continue or take the job he's been offered in an ad agency?"

Seller was bowled over. "It was the first time I'd experienced a musical that was talking directly to me and I had a very strong, visceral response to the music." He wrote to Larson outlining his own shaky producer credentials and two weeks later they forged the beginning of a

professional relationship that culminated in *Rent*.

The show itself progressed through years of try-outs and rewrites. Seller took three friends along to an early reading in 1993. "It was inchoate, musically very powerful, but it was just a seed of what was to come and he hadn't yet developed plot or character." Two of his friends left at the interval and the third advised him to persuade

Larson to drop it and move to the next work. Over a year later, after hooking up with director Michael Greif, Larson pulled Seller back to a workshop version. "I took my business partner and to cover myself I said 'this is either going to be brilliant or a piece of shit' but by Mimì's entrance with 'Light My Candle' we were hooked." He struck a deal to help finance a production at New York Theatre Workshop in return for the future commercial rights.

His instincts were sound. The reviews for the 1996 NYTW production were ecstatic and tickets simply vanished but this off-off-Broadway venue with its large, deep stage only seats 150. With a cast of fifteen and five musicians it made no financial sense. Broadway proper, however, remained an intimidating dream.

"But I got a feeling, 'if this show can't play Broadway then I gotta do something else with my career'. I grew up wanting to work there and I thought, 'if this isn't Broadway then Broadway ain't me any more'. Lawyers, friends and everyone told me 'I know you got great reviews, but do you know how many times the word 'death' is mentioned in those reviews? The downtown audience won't go uptown and the uptown audience won't go to a 'death' show. Go off-Broadway, you'll run forever'. Undeterred, he played a hunch and

Engaging: Adam Pascal as Roger and Krysten Cummings as Mimì in 'Rent' (left) and the cast of the show (below)
Photographs: Nobby Clark



re-opened the show in Broadway's derelict Nederlander Theatre, virtually unused since 1980. Two years later and counting, Seller can luxuriate in the knowledge that he was right.

Part of his conviction stemmed from the unusually convincing chemistry between Larson's dramatic material and his use of rock music. "Most kids who grow up wanting to write Broadway shows don't know the rock vernacular. Then you have middle-aged rock'n'roll people who see an audience for the music, but they don't have the experience of writing character or plot-driven song. Jonathan grew up in the 70s and loved Billy Joel and Elton John... he knew how to get the pump of an electric guitar into music that tells a story."

The analysis is right. Rock musical hits are virtually non-existent. *Hair* had a great score and novelty value (its youthful, iconoclastic view and the nudity) but was really a re-vue and *Jesus Christ Superstar* is far more successful musically than dramatically. Even Paul Simon had a mega-flop with *The Capeman*. The staging of *Tommy* collapsed over here although it had much longer run in the USA. Even there it barely made a profit. According to Seller, investors made two cents on every dollar for the New York run. The smart guys who paid for *Rent* have more than quadrupled their investment. (Now you know why people keep producing expensive musicals).

There was one other reason for the storm of publicity surrounding the workshop production. Hours after the dress rehearsal, Jonathan Larson suddenly died of an aortic aneurysm. He never saw his success. "You didn't have to know him to mourn him. He was a bohemian artist with a bathtub in his kitchen who until six weeks before he died was working in a diner. It was like he almost became a character in his own play. It was a strange, awful fate that got a lot of press," acknowledges Seller, quietly.

"Did it help catapult *Rent* into the stratosphere? Yes. Did it have anything to do with its long-term success? No. Three years later people are still going because they want to see the show."

'Rent' is at the Shaftesbury Theatre (0171-379 5399). £10 tickets are available two hours before curtain-up.



Revival finds a league of its own

Shooting Star
Chester Gateway Theatre

IMAGINE: a star footballer, say David Beckham, combs his centre-parting to ask a favour of his fiancée's employer. Can Vicky have next Wednesday and Thursday off so we can get married? Two days! But the employer happens also to be the chairman of a rival club, currently in a comic state of disarray, and he spies a chance to save his team.

How does a transfer, a part-time job in the firm's packing department, on top of your £12 a week, and a little house so you won't have to live with Vicky's folks, sound to you? Yes please Mr Sugar, says the

earnest Becky, searching for his forelock. Mr Ferguson doesn't like me dribbling at United.

The Professional Footballers Association should have demanded to sponsor Chester Gateway's ingenious idea to revive Basil Thomas' 1948 football comedy *Shooting Star* since it serves to show exactly how they can now afford to do so. In that era of the leather ball, the 2pm kick-off and the maximum wage, the footballer is Red Rutter, "the Dribbler", of Todchester Rovers (Tony Forsyth), and the chairman Joseph Lawson (Kenneth Gilbert) who has let his printing business go to pot in his quest for trophies for Burnville United.

Appropriately there is not a

glimpse of green here for the real action is in office and boardroom, beautifully recreated in period by Norman Coates with its wooden filing

micro of *Shooting Star*, as he did, among many others, Rattigan's *The Deep Blue Sea*. He can clearly still cover every blade of grass. But the future can be

It is fascinating to see a work with no pretension at all to be a serious "issues" play dealing so effectively with ground-level economics

cabinets, ponderous panelling and yards of full worsted. Moreover, it is staged by someone who was there: Frith Banbury directed the West End pre-

limpsed working itself up. The parallel plot in which Lawson's firm is sliding towards failure is a microcosm of an industry reluctant to mod-

ernise and trading on the uncritical patronage of its traditional clients. This action is perceptively and quite movingly associated with the hesitant middle-aged romance of Lawson's secretary (Angela Scoular) and the major client's rep, excellently played Philip Bond. It is fascinating to see a work with no pretension at all to be a serious "issues" play dealing so effectively with ground-level economics. And the future economics of football are also in sight.

Apparently a hatter wouldn't melt office mouse Ned's fiancée Mavis sees exactly the injustice of the chattel system and what the earning power of her "young man" really is.

Chloe Newsome may look like porcelain but she shows Mavis has certainly some shot on her. Perhaps, back in 1948, Jimmy Hill was in the gods taking notes. Unfortunately the play recoils from modernity with the revanchism of Corinthian values in the person of the old amateur and new chairman Jack Bannerman (Antony Gabriel).

The game's the thing once more, and gone is the old defence. When Mavis tries to open negotiations with him she is quickly silenced. But not for long, not for long.

Shooting Star runs until 23 May; tickets 01244 340392

Jeffrey Wainwright

Wilde's wit falls victim to a singing spectre

The Canterville Ghost,
Northcott Theatre,
Exeter

OSCAR WILDE's whimsical short story has survived a film, with Charles Laughton mugging for dear life, but even when filled out with the telling of Wilde's children stories, *The Happy Prince*, there is hardly enough substance for a musical. This is not the Wilde of the scathing wit. Just light humour with a touch of sentiment.

It may have been the presence of musicians in the or-

chestra pit, or the baronial ball set, but I had the impression that we were in for a 1920's style musical comedy. *The Canterville Ghost* proves to be a bit more substantial than that; although the songs seem to spring out of nowhere in the musical comedy tradition.

A story of how an American family invade a stately home dates from the time when Americans wore check suits and big cigars, made vast fortunes from the invention of gadgets, and were loud and harsh and supremely insensitive to British traditions and

culture. Hiram Otis and Lucretia Otis, with their brutish boy twins and deep feeling young daughter, help to release *The Canterville Ghost* from

ancient rhyme the ghost can only be released from his purgatory by a young girl's tears. Step forward Virginia, the youngest Otis, imbued with a

Ron Moody's predicament engages the audience and his presence carries the show beyond its expectations

400 years of frightening molecules. The Otis tribe exorcise the ghost by simply not believing in him. According to an

strong streak of sentimentality for helpless aberrations. There are some good songs. "A Ray of Light", sung by ghost Ron

Moody, has the endearing battle through optimism of a popular tear-stained ballet, and Charles Miller's music has a lyrical lilt which lasts throughout. Peter Quilter's script sticks slavishly to the original. Only his song lyrics add anything new. *The Canterville Ghost* has some period charm but is essentially light-weight. There are times when Ron Moody's predicament engages the audience. His considerable stage presence carries the show beyond its expectations. The Otis family. Steven Wickham, Corinna Powlasand, the twins

Gavin Eaton and Jamie Golding, and Shelli Andrew as the catalyst juvenile go through their routines efficiently. Nicola Sloane, the doomy housekeeper, has a few numbers in the Ivor Novello mould.

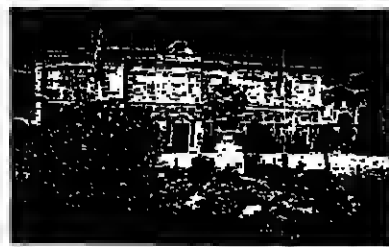
The production, by Brian De Savo, is full of thrills and flashes and a couple of stage illusions – the big finish when the Ghost ascends a staircase into the clouds sent the audience away happy.

The Canterville Ghost runs until the 23rd May.

Allen Saddler

THE INDEPENDENT

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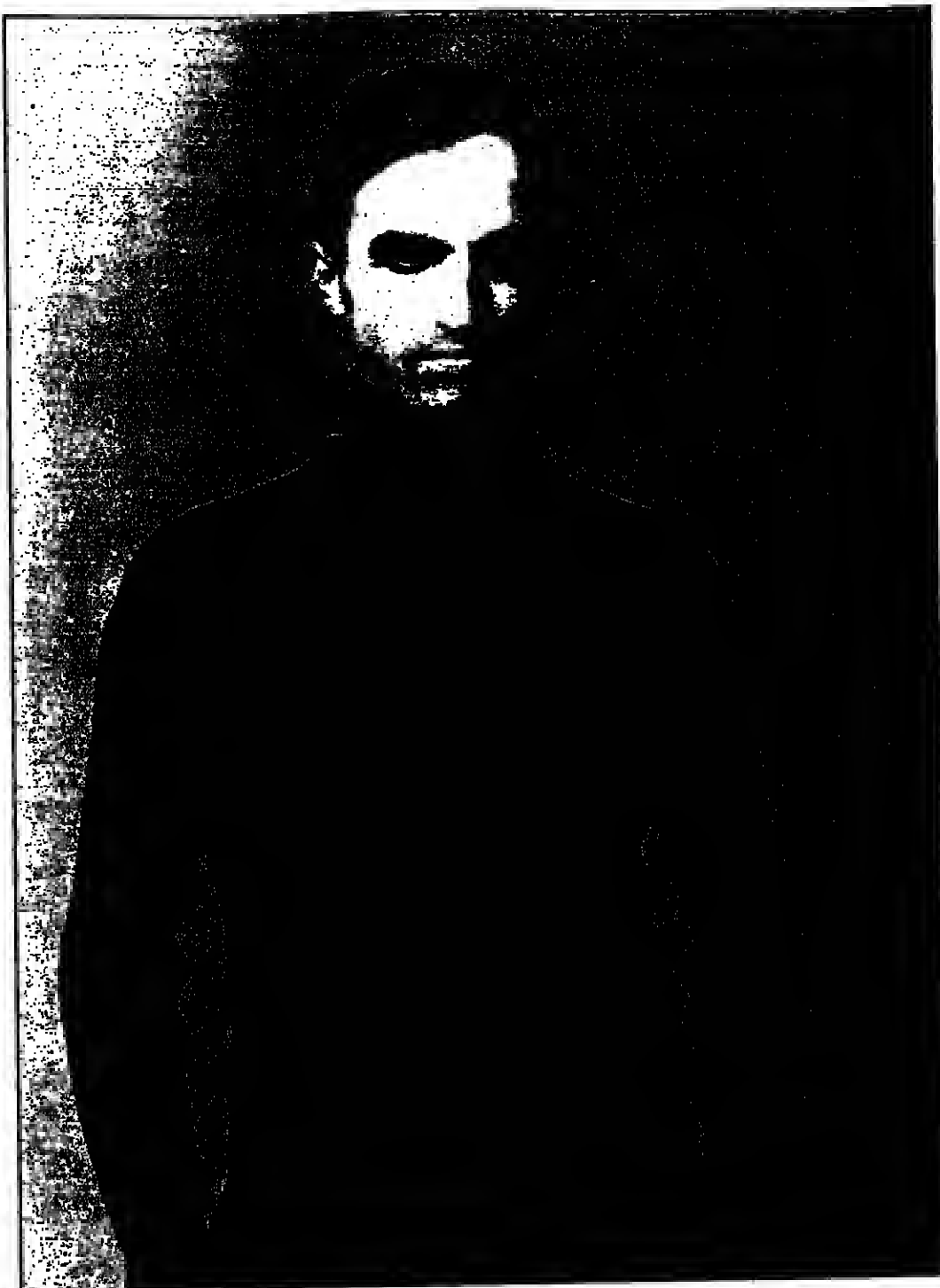
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مكتبة من الأدب

The man who turned Madonna into a Goth

Right: Nicolas Ghesquiere, head designer at Balenciaga



When Madonna gives a designer her seal of approval, his success is assured. Nicolas Ghesquiere, the new man at Balenciaga, cannot fail: the pop star is already quite a fan. Ian Phillips meets the great couturier's latest successor at his Paris studio



Crêpe dress with kimono sleeves by Balenciaga, £915 from Joseph, 77/79 Fulham Road, London, SW3. Enquiries: 0171 823 9500.



Madonna gave Ghesquiere his first public outing, when she wore one of his monastic designs to the Golden Globe Awards earlier in the year



Asymmetric cape top, £575, and matching trousers, £279, from Joseph as before Photographs: Ben Elwes

WHEN the fashion house Balenciaga was looking for a new designer early last year, there were reports that it was planning to bring in a big-shot designer. The names of Helmut Lang and Yohji Yamamoto were bandied about. The fashion flock started to get all flustered. Then, it was announced that an unknown 26-year-old called Nicolas Ghesquiere would actually be taking over. To which the general reaction was "Er, who?"

At the same time, Ghesquiere was also hired to design the women's collection for Massaro, and just 12 months later both appointments look like an incredibly smart move. His latest collection for Balenciaga was the highlight of Paris Fashion Week, and shortly after his first collection in October, Madonna adopted him as one of her new fashion darlings.

At the Golden Globes in January, she chose out to wear any of her favoured designers, such as Dolce & Gabbana or Versace. Instead, she turned up in a long-sleeved, full-skirted black Balenciaga dress, which she described as "Goth". On a trip to Paris last month to promote her new album, she took time out to pop into Balenciaga for a fitting

and walked away with a choice of 10 outfits for the Academy Awards. On the night, she chose to wear an outfit by the latest avant-garde designer on the block, Olivier Theyskens, but that's another story.

When asked about his most famous client, Ghesquiere is suitably discreet. He will, nevertheless, reveal that she discovered his creations during a shoot for *Spin* magazine with Dutch photographer Inez van Lamsweerde (a big fan of Ghesquiere). "She immediately fell for my clothes," he says. "She feels they fit into the new direction she wants to take and have obvious links to religion—something which has always fascinated her."

Indeed, Ghesquiere admits to being very attracted by the monastic aesthetic, as indeed was the old master Cristobal Balenciaga himself. In the collection for autumn/winter '98, it was apparent in the pared-down, sombre, black forms and clothes inspired by capes and cassocks. Right up until the last minute, Ghesquiere had even planned to tie thick ropes around the models' waists in the guise of belts.

In one corner of his sunny Paris office stands a board cover

ered in pictures of nuns. Next door, the American department store Barneys is placing an order.

Ghesquiere himself is sitting at a marble desk, dressed in a long-sleeved black T-shirt with his long hair crunched up at the back of his head with the aid of an elastic band. Out of the window, he has a view of the House of Dior and says that he often admires John Galliano's Mercedes as he drives by. "When I walk out of the door with my nylon bag on my back in the evening, I say to myself, 'Life's not fair,'" he jokes.

His passion and enthusiasm are quite infectious, and particularly evident when he recounts how he has always wanted to be a fashion designer. As a child, his parents worried about him because he would spend all of his holiday sketching clothes—even on the beach. In secondary school, he used to give the local butcher's daughter fashion lessons and at the age of 15, spent his summer working for Agnès b. At 18, he was hired as a design assistant by Jean-Paul Gaultier.

For him, Balenciaga, who set up his first couture business in Spain in 1919 and closed it in

Paris in 1968, is one of the top three couturiers in fashion history. Balenciaga died in 1972, but the house is now set to flourish again under Ghesquiere; since taking over the design helm, the young designer has managed to revive the great Spaniard's style. There is the same purity in the lines, the same bubble shapes and the same analysis of volumes, and the same relentless modernity.

"Balenciaga took his inspiration from Velasquez," he says, "I take mine from Princess

Leia's dress in *Star Wars*." The construction of each piece is carefully thought out and highly original. Skirts, for example, consist of four separate panels. Tunic-style tops have sleeves at the front, but look like capes from the back.

"I really don't have too much trouble designing," he says, "because Balenciaga's heritage is so inspirational." He certainly seems well informed about the late couturier's life—how he started off reproducing models of Parisian couture in San Se-

bastian; how he was "out at all sociable, but rather solitary, discreet and stern"; and how, when he announced that he was quitting fashion, Christian Dior himself came to beg him to continue.

"Before he quit, Balenciaga did say one thing," he continues. "That he regretted not being younger so that he could do a ready-to-wear collection for a younger, more active woman." In Ghesquiere, at least, he has a worthy heir to carry out his wish.

HOT THING



Odeur 53 by Comme des Garçons

IT IS most bizarre. A perfume that is not a perfume, and yet is an 'odeur' being sold as a perfume. Or is it just an odeur? It is called Odeur 53, (imagine saying that, should someone ask 'what is that scent?'). It comes from 'ooses' at the laboratory of International Flavour and Fragrance, and was commissioned by Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons, who is launching it to an unsuspecting public on 11 May.

As a concept, it redefines the whole idea of modern perfume, and the smell is unique too, which is rare. The IFF describes it as '53 abstract notions evoking images, creating your own air around you,' and 'a memory of a smell', and after spritzing it around it does seem more akin to a breath of fresh air than an actual smell. This is because it has been made by chemically recreating 53 inorganic smells, such as sand dunes, fire energy, washing drying in the wind, burnt rubber and the

freshness of oxygen, using a method which takes nothing from nature, and thus is truly environmentally friendly.

Because it is comes from Comme des Garçons, the bottle (designed by Kawakubo) is clunky and gorgeous, it is highly conceptual, and involves 'a process' to gain the final result, which is sure to please Comme fans. More than that, however, this fragrance is the first step away from ozonic scents like the unisex cK One, and the next step towards the millennium. And what's more, the smell, which is also unisex, is quite addictive. A sure Hot Thing.

Odeur 53 will be available exclusively from Liberty, Regent Street, London W1 from 11 May for two weeks. 200ml eau de toilette, £39, 150ml eau de toilette, £13. From 25 May it will be available from leading department stores nationwide. For mail order inquiries, call Liberty on 0171 734 1234 ext. 2445

Melanie Rickey

OUT OF THE BATHROOM CABINET

Gwyneth Paltrow

SHE is dressed by Donna Karan for her role in *Great Expectations* and by Calvin Klein in *Sliding Doors*. She has become fashion's most wanted woman. Even her nails have a designer label slapped on them. They are painted courtesy of radical Californian cosmetics company, Urban Decay. The range includes Meltdown (metallic blue) and Snow (pearly yellow). The price is £11.50, but when you're Gwyneth Paltrow, the entire range comes with the territory. For stockist information and mail order, ring 0171-636 2523

Susanna Cohen



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Now listen to me: 'Our mother was a classic single parent with five children, long before we knew there was such a thing as a single parent' Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid

The other Mr Straw

Ed, brother of the more famous Jack, has grown up the hard way. Jack O'Sullivan meets the Home Secretary's brother

HE looks alarmingly like his older brother. Those severe, angular features, the same steely, greying hair, that firm, squared off finger making points with the determination of Thomas Gradgrind. And, likewise, there is some of the Dickensian teacher's grimness lingering around a lean figure, which seems to say that life was not always so easy.

Ed Straw, the Home Secretary's younger brother, is setting out his prescription for better relationships and better parenting. National TV should, he argues in a detailed and influential report, have to devote two hours a week to the subject. A huge campaign should be waged, equivalent to the drink-drive campaign in its capacity to change attitudes. Proper support and advice for couples and families could save the Treasury £40n a year—the cost, he says, of broken families.

But what is he like, this prophet of marital bliss, whose family connection has prompted such attention to his message? Will Ed turn out to be as repeat of the naff Terry Major-Ball, whose filial

shadow haunted our own former Prime Minister?

The form is not good. Only last year, as Jack Straw frog-marched his 17-year-old son, William, down to the police station over allegations of supplying cannabis, Uncle Ed's history was dragged up. Ed had been "an enthusiastic user" of dope back in the Sixties, claimed a fellow student.

In fact, Ed Straw is probably as respected in his field as brother Jack is in the political world. A partner at Coopers & Lybrand, the management consultants, he has run unsuccessfully for the chairmanship and specialises in media businesses. His expertise in relationships springs ostensibly from being chairman of the trustees of Relate, with which he has been involved for 12 years. But his authority comes from being trained in a hard school—the Straw family.

When Ed Straw was eight and Jack was 11, their father left home. They saw him again a couple of months later. Ed was 43 when they next met. "Thirty-five years is a long time not to see your father,"

he explains. "At some level I put my father into a box labelled 'Does not exist'. I look back now and realise that was totally the wrong thing to do, but it was a way of coping with a situation, which I persisted with when I got older."

Why, I asked, had his father not seen him for so long? Ed, now 49, chooses his words kindly. He seems a warmer, less wary figure than his brother. Perhaps it's not wearing glasses. Or not belonging to the Labour Party. Or maybe the dope softened him up a bit all those years ago. "I think," he says, "people underestimate the emotional roller-coaster that the non-custodial parent goes through when seeing their children fleetingly."

"As a consequence, a lot of fathers find the easiest option is to separate completely."

His parents had never enjoyed a good relationship. "It started during the War. Like a lot of people, they went into it with great hope, but it got more difficult from then on. The only way to describe it is as 'high in conflict'. It was not physically violent—but words can be just as hurtful as physical violence."

There were five children, which just added to the burden of the relationship.

His father remarried a woman who already had children. He worked in insurance and eventually became a technical librarian at Stansted airport before retirement. Some money found its way back to the Straw children, but their mother, a nursery teacher, raised them alone in a council house in Essex. Jack, Ed and their younger brother, Willie, all won scholarships to an Essex boarding school.

"Our mother," he says, "was a classic single parent with five children living in a council house long before we knew there was such a thing as single parents. It was completely novel. But we just got on with our lives." Did Jack, I wonder, play a fatherhood role as the eldest of the three boys? "No, that wasn't the dynamic we had. I tended to pair off more with Willie, and younger sister, Helen, while Jack paired off with our eldest sister, Sue."

Are they close now? "To be honest we get on with our lives. We were once described as 'good brothers'. We like each

other. We both have families and our families see each other from time to time."

You cannot, however, avoid reading a little filial tension into some of Ed Straw's outspoken statements on the failures of the state to rehabilitate youngsters who go off the rails. On the vicious circle of domestic abuse, crime and then state punishment, he declares: "You could not do more for ensuring the continuance of domestic violence if you tried. Yet members of the Government defend it."

And he regrets unwillingness to tackle family problems more imaginatively. "The Government is scared witless. Given the background, they are hardly going to say, 'How about a back to basics campaign'. It is a poisoned chalice, and so arms-length organisations are needed to do this work."

Ed Straw now sees his father regularly. "I spoke to him last night," he says. Ironically, just a year after meeting up with him again, Ed Straw's own marriage broke up, after he and his wife had had three children, now aged 22, 20 and 17. But this time, the outcome

has been different. The children stayed with their mother, but their father has a home 200 yards away. "Far from losing touch, I feel that we are now very close."

So what made his own marriage flounder? Ed Straw is as magnanimous to his ex-wife and he is to his father. "I think I was a far better natural parent than I was a natural partner."

Perhaps all this history hardly recommends Ed Straw as someone with the answers for a country which has the highest divorce rate in Europe. But you have to give him credit for his openness. He even admits that, when his own marriage got into trouble, he did not call on the services of counsellors, nor indeed of Relate, with which he had already been involved professionally for several years. Like most people who need such help, those who need it most find it hardest to ask. Even when they are as knowledgeable as Ed Straw.

Relative Values: Support for Relationships and Parenting by Ed Straw is available for £4.95 plus 60 p.p.p. from Demos. 0171 353 4479.

Are chocoholics safe from the pods of doom?

World supplies of chocolate are under threat from a deadly blight. Ann Treneman is grief-stricken

UNTIL yesterday, black pod disease was the least of my worries. In fact, I didn't even know it existed. And then came the breakfast phone call. "Have you seen the news about chocolate? It's under threat!" said someone who may once have been classified as a friend. "Black pod disease is threatening to wipe out the cacao bean and that means chocolate could be as expensive as *filet mignon*! Will you be able to afford it?"

I poured myself another bowl of Choco-Flakes and reminded myself to screen my calls more carefully. Then I started to worry. Black pod disease sounded pretty bad: in fact, give or take a word or two, it could be the black death. Other questions hovered. Could it be related to Black Rod? And how did Ebola figure in all of this? And still the voice in my ear did not stop: "And there is also something called *Witches' Broom* which is killing all the trees in Brazil!"

I put the phone down and took stock. How had the supply of Terry's Chocolate Oranges been allowed to drop below five and why hadn't I purchased Cadbury's Mini-Eggs when they were a multi-buy bargain? The truth was that I was only a couple of dozen of Penguins away from a chocolate crisis.

But surely there must be some mistake. Perhaps it was just a case of those bastards who love to taunt us with the latest health news/scare/terrors having a bit of fun. If black pod disease was really about to make Mini-Eggs extinct, wouldn't I have known about this? I have known about this? A few strains of the lethal black pod disease is threatening more than a million tons of cocoa, leading food experts to predict a world shortage of chocolate.

Life was so unfair! Now what were those of us who rely on chocolate for our supplies of the stimulant theobromine and the love-drug phenylethylamine to do? Obviously such things would soon have to be obtained illegally in dark car parks and pub loos. A life of crime awaited. Our only hope was that New Labour would allow chocolate to be prescribed on the NHS. I could see the patches now.

But I seemed to be getting ahead of myself. First, surely, more information on black pod was required. It turns out that this thing is a cousin of potato blight, and once the fungus

gets into a pod it all goes rotten. (Pods, just in case you haven't read *Encyclopaedia Britannica* lately, are produced by the slow-growing trees after six years, are the size of small footballs and contain 40 cocoa beans each.) According to Tony Lass, an expert at Cadbury, a new strain of black pod has evolved in Africa and had quickly spread to the border of the Ivory Coast. "It's now sitting on the frontier," said Mr Lass, "where a million tons of cocoa a year is under threat."

I had no faith in Ivory Coast frontier control and immediately tried to ring Mr Lass at Cadbury's. He was "out" for the afternoon but there was a Mr Tony Frost who was speaking on behalf of black pod. "There is a new strain. What is it called? Black pod actually. A new strain of an old friend," he said with what could have been regarded as a dangerous nonchalance. "This news really came out of a conference held in Panama on what could be done to counter the pests and diseases besetting the cocoa plant. But you've got to keep in mind that we already lose 20 to 30 per cent of production to



pests and disease. You've got to get that into context."

So what does that mean? Rejoice for Mini-Eggs? "This is certainly not a plague and the price is not going to shoot up to that of fillet steak," he said. I started to feel better and, as Mr Frost let rip with lots of info about sustainability and how it's better if the cocoa growers know each tree individually, even began to relax. He began to tell me about pod borers (no relation to black pod, thankfully) and gave a very entertaining account of how *Witches' Broom* affects the flowers and causes tendrill-like growths on the trees instead. "In fact, in Brazil we lost half of the product in one year and I don't suppose you even noticed," he said.

Sweet relief! And Alan Porter at the Chocolate Society was equally upbeat. "No, there are no worries. It's just hype. There really is no major crisis. But, I can't help but worry and perhaps it wouldn't hurt to stock up on Mini-Eggs just this once. After all, another lethal strain of black pod could strike at any time."



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The man who's selling Diana to the people

SHORT, balding and bespectacled, he looks a bit like Nick Hornby. Dave Brett could have turned out to be a real-life version of Roh Fleming, the music-obsessive around whom Hornby based his best-selling novel *High Fidelity*.

Like Fleming, he rejected the option of a regular career in favour of setting up a backstreet record shop. But while the neurotic Fleming allowed his life and his shop to drift, Brett has turned his business into a £30m-a-year operation.

Not only does he now own six record stores, he is fast becoming Britain's Mr Box Office. He now presides over the largest ticket agency in British ownership. With sales reaching over a million tickets a year, he can now give the two giants, American-owned Ticketmaster and Canadian First Call, a run for their money.

Yet until now few people have been aware of Dave Brett. They think they are buying tickets from radio stations and NME and *Melody Maker* when in fact they are buying via his Nottingham-based Way Ahead group, which has kept the name of the tiny record store Brett opened 17 years ago.

Two earlier this year, Brett won one of the most coveted deals ever: Way Ahead was chosen as the agent with the sole rights for selling all the tickets to the Diana museum at Althorp Park, the final resting place of the Princess of Wales.

Way Ahead is used to coping with demand: when Oasis played at Knebworth in 1996, it shifted a quarter of a million tickets inside a day and took 60,000 fans to the show in a fleet of 1,200 coaches. But nothing could have prepared the company for the onslaught on their telephone system on January 5, the day that tickets went on sale for Althorp. Although the ticket lines did not open until 9am, the company received 10,000 enquiries between midnight and 6am.

Rob Wilmsburst, Way Ahead's 28-year-old general manager, says that when the lines did open, many callers were emotional and, believing they were calling Althorp, asked to leave messages of condolence for the Spencer family. Within four days, 140,000 of the 152,000 tickets had been sold.

Many callers were so keen to visit the museum that they



In demand: Way Ahead's owner Dave Brett Photograph: John Lawrence

called as soon as they could, without knowing exactly where Althorp was. But they were keen to know what they might see. In fact, each ticket allows them entry to the museum in a converted 18th-century stable house, filled with memorabilia including family photographs, cine film and other mementoes with a selection of tributes and condolence books that were sent to the Spencer family.

Earl Spencer was severely criticised for charging £9.50 per ticket, and Way Ahead is at pains to stress that this is not a

profit-making venture for the company. But the deal buys it prestige it would take years to otherwise obtain.

"[Althorp] are not doing this for any commercial reason. They are not going to advertise this," Mr Wilmsburst says. As a consequence, nearly eight thousand tickets remain unsold, with Althorp due to open its gates for two months on July 1.

He is convinced that the explanation for the unsold tickets is that the public firmly believes all of them were sold in the stampede of the first week of January. "Without a doubt people would be surprised to find out that tickets are still available," he says.

"This moves into a completely different area from the rock and pop arena."

Indeed, Dave Brett has come a long way since the days when he sold Judas Priest LPs for a profit margin of one and a half pence a copy.

The ticket operation began as an across the counter service, a way of helping some of his record shop's customers get to concerts out of town by laying on coach trips. It was the revolution in independent radio, the opening of the National Ex-

hibition Centre in Birmingham, and Brett's willingness to embrace new technology, that made Way Ahead the biggest box office operator outside London.

It is technology that has transformed people's ticket-buying habits. The days of fans queuing for hours to buy tickets outside a venue as soon as dates were announced are long gone. When tickets recently went on sale for the Spice Girls live shows in London and Sheffield only five people bothered to queue outside Way Ahead for tickets. By contrast, 1,000 booked via the Internet.

Now 44, Brett recalls watching "just about every band on the live circuit". His lifestyle today, though, is "not very rock 'n' roll": he lives alone in a Nottinghamshire village, and drives a Range Rover. The man who used to rub shoulders with Bobo now concentrates on showing his prize-winning hull mastiff, Molly, at Crufts. "I've got 16 orders for puppies from all over the world," he says, with as much pride as if he was announcing a ticketing deal with the rock superstars of the age.

Ian Burrell

كلنا من الواصل

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When 'defeat' is a victory for peace

THERE HAS BEEN a clear pattern in recent years: only those who do not wish to change too much are in a position eventually to deliver revolutionary change.

The Oslo accords that seemed to pave the way for peace in the Middle East were agreed by Yitzhak Rabin, an Israeli prime minister who had never been known for dovishness. His assassination removed, in the short term at least, the possibility of change: Shimon Peres, more obviously committed to a peaceful solution, could not carry the country with him in the way that Mr Rabin had briefly seemed able to do. In Northern Ireland, the traditional intransigence of Gerry Adams and of David Trimble has seemed in previous years to be a problem. More obviously, however, it has recently come to seem a bonus, in the sense that neither of them can easily be portrayed as a sell-out.

Both in Oslo and in the case of earlier Middle East talks - most notably the Camp David agreement, brokered by the United States between Israel and Egypt - the deal came only after it seemed certain that it would founder. As in Belfast in the days before the Good Friday agreement, this was more than just brinkmanship. Both sides cared passionately about what they thought they might lose. Both sides knew that it would be almost impossible to change the terms, after the deal had been struck.

Theoretically, one could make the same case with the Israeli-Palestinian indirect talks in London this week - where Madeleine Albright, the US Secretary of State, shuttled between two London hotels. Tony Blair said that there was neither breakthrough nor breakdown. Mrs Albright announced that the United States is ready to invite the participants for further meetings in Washington next week, if further progress is made. For the moment, however, the chances of an outbreak of sanity look woefully slim. None of the participants has staked their political life on the outcome.

The Ulster deadline set by the US mediator George Mitchell was, on the face of it, quite artificial. In theory, it did not matter a jot whether a peace deal was agreed before the Easter weekend or a few days or weeks or later. In practice, however, the setting of an unmissable deadline was crucial. All parties at Stormont, whatever their differences on politics, shared the view that this was their last chance. If they did not manage to hammer something out through the long night (and then another night, and then another), then everything else would be lost, for the foreseeable future.

In London this week, by contrast, there has been a strong sense of merely walking through the part. The Israeli leader, Benjamin Netanyahu, who has repeatedly made clear his contempt for the spirit of the Oslo accords, may eventually come to accept the inevitability of change. For the moment, however, he still seems locked into the positions held by both sides in Northern Ireland just a few years ago, where any backdown was seen as a defeat, not as a potential victory for both sides.

Mr Netanyahu talked yesterday of the need to "close all the gaps" and of "resolving outstanding issues". But he also emphasised "a very simple point: we cannot compromise on Israel's security". This includes a blunt refusal to give up 13 per cent of the West Bank, as proposed by the Americans, as part of the redeployment agreed in the Oslo accords.

Even the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat - who had more reason than most to be pessimistic - appeared almost upbeat. He noted "some progress", and said that "time is needed in order to achieve an agreement". Following his 50-minute meeting with Mr Blair at Downing Street, Mr Arafat rejected the suggestion that the talks had failed.

Despite attempts to put a brave face on the progress of the talks there seems, however, little chance of real change while Mr Netanyahu is so obviously wedded to the win-or-lose scenario - for his own domestic electoral reasons. Hawkishness is good for votes. And yet, as Cyril Ramaphosa, senior negotiator in South Africa's transition from apartheid, emphasised on a visit to Northern Ireland last week, agreements only become possible when both sides recognise that they must lose something, in order to win. It is a message Mr Arafat has long since learnt - even while the radical pressures on him continue. If Mr Netanyahu fails to learn that basic lesson, then Israelis and Palestinians alike will have little reason to remember him fondly. What seems like a retreat can easily come to seem an advance. Standing firm, meanwhile, can come to seem the greatest defeat of all.

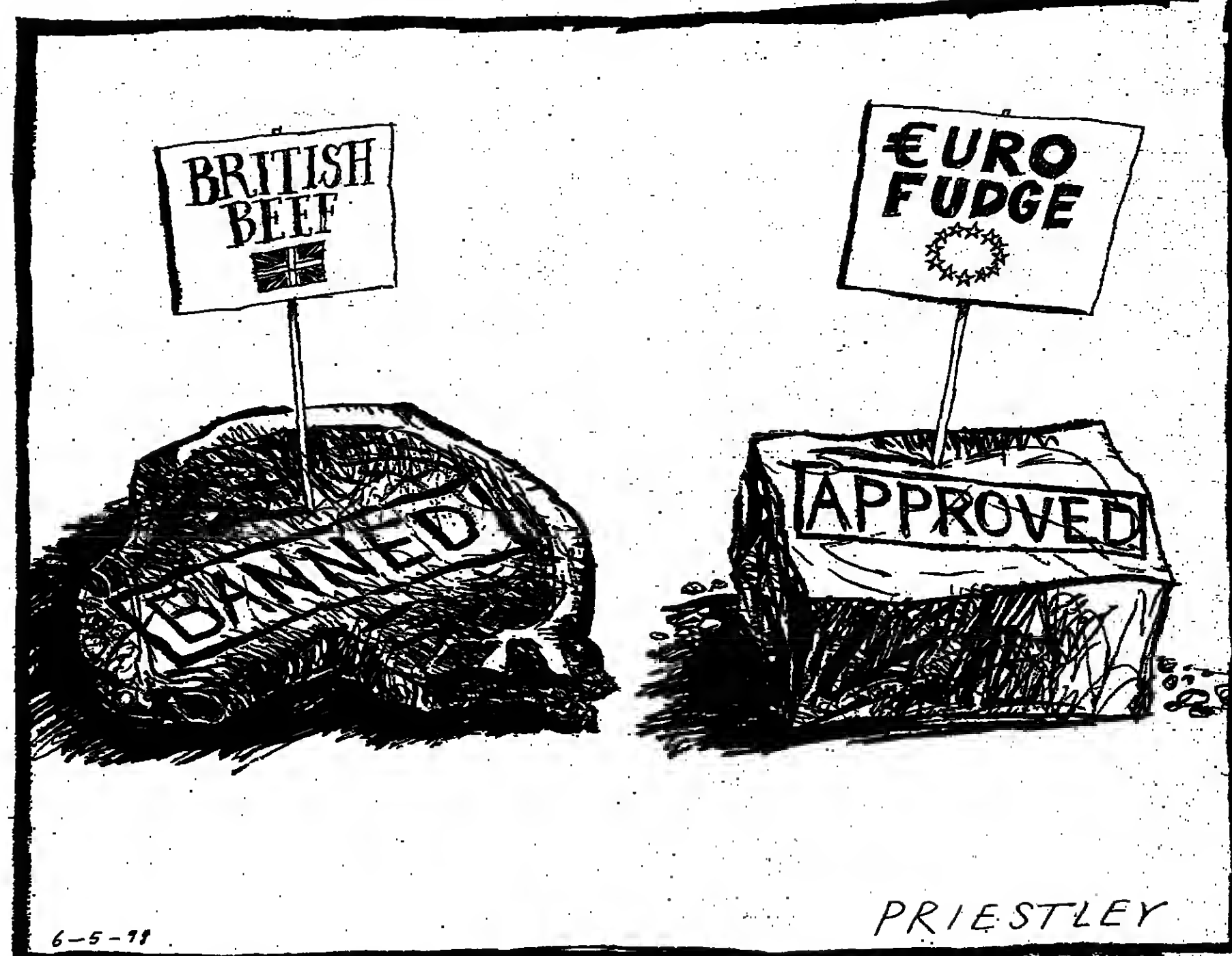
C4: back to new ways

ACCORDING TO the Independent Television Commission, some of Channel 4's recent output has been lacking the vital quality of innovation. This is a serious charge.

When Channel 4 was launched in 1982, it was told to innovate and experiment and to devote a "suitable proportion" of programming to tastes and interests not catered for by ITV. It took its remit seriously. Channel 4 has changed British television for the better. *Brookside* challenges taboos routinely. *Film On Four* has boosted the British film industry with works such as *Shallow Grave* and *Trainspotting*. *The Big Breakfast* was experimental, if nothing else. We were given the surreal comedy of *Father Ted*. All this is good, indeed excellent, television. So what is Channel 4 doing wrong?

The ITC believes Channel 4 may have strayed from its remit recently in its factual broadcasting. In particular, there has been insufficient attention paid to "adult education", which is dominated by gardening, cookery and pets. *Channel 4 News*, excellent though it is, has not witnessed very much innovation recently. Channel 4 needs to address these weaknesses and there are encouraging signs that its new boss, Michael Jackson, knows this.

Mr Jackson, when he was with the BBC, suggested that the Channel 4's courtship of a young audience had gone too far and threatened to overshadow its achievements in documentaries, drama, and the arts. He asked: "Am I alone in thinking that the pursuit of demographics - in particular young, lager-drinking, upwardly mobile men - has led to a sapping of Channel 4's originality? Has consumerism eroded the spirit of curiosity?" The ITC report suggests that he was not on his own. Thanks to the phasing-out of the levy paid to the ITV companies, Mr Jackson is now able to make the most of the station's success in pulling in advertising. The mild rebuke of the ITC gives him all the excuse he needs to follow his instincts.



Rights and religions

Sir: We welcome the Government's determination to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into British law through the Human Rights Bill, now moving into its committee stage in the House of Commons. The Human Rights Act will be a keystone in creating a more just and equitable society.

We believe that faith communities and their associated organisations should respond warmly to legislation which makes it easier for United Kingdom citizens to protect their basic human rights. While we recognise some of the anxieties expressed by other Christians regarding the Bill's implications, sound legal opinion and the experience of churches in Europe indicate that Article 9, dealing with religious freedom, provides clear and proper protection. Such fears are therefore misplaced. We deplore attempts by some Christians to weaken the Bill through exemption-type amendments. We encourage Her Majesty's Government to reject devices which surround the Bill with exclusions, defences and opt-outs. Such exemptions would be inconsistent with its manifesto commitment to "bring rights home".

We affirm the values represented by the Human Rights Bill. As such they challenge our religious institutions in the way they conduct themselves as human communities. Those who oppose the full incorporation of the European Convention, by challenging the inclusion of churches and other religious bodies within the definition of "public authority", are in danger of creating legislation which is less rather than more satisfactory to the churches. Narrow and misguided institutional self-interest should give way to an embrace of those rights and values which will enhance the common good.

BEN BRADSHAW MP
(Exeter, Lab)
CHRIS BRYANT
Christian Socialist Movement
NADIR DINSHAW
JOHN GIBSON
Catholics for a Changing Church
+JOHN GUILDFORD
(The Right Rev John Gladwin,
Bishop of Guildford)
The Most Rev RICHARD
HOLLOWAY

Bishop of Edinburgh
HELENA KENNEDY
(Baroness Kennedy of the Shaws)
RICHARD KIRKER
Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement
Canon MARTYN PERCY, DAVID
MCLEAN
The Lincoln Theological Institute
MARTIN PENDERGAST
Christians for Human Rights
The Right Rev PETER SELBY
Bishop of Worcester
VALERIE STRUD
We Are Church (UK)
ELIZABETH STUART
Professor of Theology, Winchester
+ROWAN MONMOUTH
(The Right Rev Rowan Williams,
Bishop of Monmouth)
London E9

Eurobank row

Sir: The behaviour of the French government in forcing the splitting of the presidency of the European Central Bank raises grave questions about the true motives of the French participation in the European construction. France's pursuit of hollow grandeur at the expense of reason and noblesse d'esprit could have hardly come at a worse time.

However, now is not the time to express naïve shock and jeer from the sidelines at Euro-politics. Nor can we allow a 15-nation project to become a statist and interventionist model designed by the French for them to use as an extension of their own national power.

It is only by playing a full part within the EU that the UK can wrestle with French influence and, together with other countries, try to prevent such acts of egotism. OLIVER CARDIGAN
London W14

Sir: The French want their man to be head of the European Central Bank, and everyone else doesn't. The French get their way. The British want their beef and chocolate to be sold through

out the EU, and everyone else doesn't. Everyone else gets their way. Maybe I'm missing something here, but couldn't everyone else simply have told the French where they get off?

RICHARD BARTLE
Colchester, Essex

Sir: Giles Radice claims (Comment, 4 May), that "it could be to our last- ing national disadvantage to put off the decision to join the euro too long". In fact it would be to our last- ing national advantage to make the decision now not to join.

History shows that the artificial union of disparate nation states always ends in bloodshed. And I fear for the future of our grandchildren. The loss of sovereignty by absorption in to a "country called Europe", the inevitable eventual consequence of our membership of EMU, would spell the end of our considerable influence in the world - an influence which has been a force for good over many centuries. It would also spell the end of our prosperity, hard-won as an independent nation.

Harmonisation, the buzz-word of the EU, is all about agreement and compatibility, and yet France and Germany, the two countries which intend to rule Europe, cannot agree on the simple issue of the chairmanship of the European Central Bank. GERRY HANSON
Iwer Heath, Buckinghamshire

Sir: The European Parliamentary Elections Bill, now to be considered in committee by the Lords, contains a profound change in our constitutional arrangements which ought to alarm us all.

For the first time in British history, the only choice we (excluding the Northern Irish) shall have at the forthcoming Euro-election will be to support one party or another. Once we have made that choice, seats will be awarded to the parties within electoral regions in proportion to votes gained, and they will be filled by par-

ty nominees in an order selected by the parties. So 84 out of the 87 United Kingdom MEPs will depend for their position on the service they render to the party, and not on the service they render their constituents. Is this what we really want?

SIMON GAZELEY
Bath

Real nappies

Sir: I have just read Vanya Body's letter (2 May) sitting in my sunny garden, where a line of snow-white nappies flap in the breeze, and would like to encourage her to resist peer pressure and try "real" nappies.

I started to use them four and a half years ago, when my second child was born, and my youngest is, I trust, about to hide them far away. My original sets of nappies are still going (and white), and I reckon I have saved mountains of landfill, considerable sums of money and a great deal of muscle power, not hugging disposables borne from the shops.

The secret is to build the soaking and washing into the schedule. Invest in a bucket with a lid, a pair of designated rubber gloves and a sense of humour for the occasional leak. Then when Vanya Body's adolescent accuses her of contributing to toxic landfill, she can say (smugly) "But I didn't!" CHARLOTTE OBOLSKY
Bristol

Box of tricks

Sir: Pandora (The Box, 28 April), suggests that I resorted to indecipherable techno-speech in a debate in the Commons. The question you quote, whilst certainly technical, was in fact a written question, and had to be in that form to get a relevant answer. I wouldn't dream of speaking in such jargon - not a single MP would understand me. MATTHEW TAYLOR MP
(Turo and St Austell, Lib Dem)
House of Commons

Men, sex and football

Sir: Annabel Ferriman is yet another in a long line of women writers who agonise over why men commit adultery or speculate why some famous person is caught with a prostitute ("Why's he a dirty Harry?", 2 May). She quotes a (woman) psychologist who has "discovered the reasons".

It really is very simple. Sperm and eggs. Men have lots of the former and our unsocialised imperative is to spread them about. With the dominant and most desirable males, the imperative is even stronger and whatever men may tell women as we gaze deeply into your eyes, even those with a below-average sex drive would be doing it all the time, if we were sure we could get away with it.

There is one area in which men and women do indeed confuse each other. Women find it difficult to believe that men genuinely do not really think they are doing anything wrong. What we do not understand is why men always get the blame and never all the women who are voluntarily doing it with us. TIMOTHY STATHER
London SW13

Sir: With reference to your leading article "Send her off and let me watch the football!" (5 May), I appear to be one of the few men in England determined to avoid seeing any of the World Cup; a lecture on the history of plywood would be more interesting. Instead, I intend to spend June and July shopping in London's West End, enjoying candle-lit dinners, sipping champagne in exclusive nightclubs, staying in five-star hotels - and having sex. Please feel free to pass on my address and telephone number to any disgruntled wives or girlfriends of football fans who would like to join me. JAMES MCANDREW
London W1

Gill's Stations

Sir: There is already a memorial in Westminster Cathedral and place of prayer for all victims of any kind of abuse (Letters, 5 May). It is called the Twelfth Station of the Cross. LAWRENCE SCOON
Workington, Cumbria



MILES KINGTON

What your name means - if it sounds funny and made up

TODAY I am glad to welcome back Dr Vernon Monicker, the man who knows more about the origin of names than anyone. He's here today to answer your queries about where your name comes from, or where someone else's name comes from, or if your name is too boring to ask questions about. All yours, Vernon!

Netanyahu's a funny sort of name, isn't it? It sounds sort of silly and made up, doesn't it?

Dr Vernon Monicker writes: Yes, it does, doesn't it? On the other hand, Yasser Arafat sounds equally silly and sort of made up, doesn't it? Dr Vernon Monicker writes: Yes, it does, doesn't it? Look, I don't want to complain, but could we have something a little less topical and controversial, please?

Garibaldi's a funny sort of name, isn't it? It

sounds sort of silly and made up, doesn't it? Dr Vernon Monicker writes: Yes, it does, doesn't it? Actually, could we have something a little MORE topical, please?

Mandelson is a funny sort of name, isn't it? Looks sort of made up, really, doesn't it?

Dr Vernon Monicker writes: Not at all. Mandelson is another name like Mendelssohn, or Thomson. Mendelssohn means "son of Mendel" and Thomson means "son of Thomas".

So Mandelson means "son of Mendel", does it?

Dr Vernon Monicker writes: Er, yes, I suppose so. Yes, definitely. I have just looked up "Mandel" in a German dictionary and in German it means either "almond" or a "tensile". So you think that Mandelson means either "Almondson" or "Tensileson", do you?

Dr Vernon Monicker writes: Look, I'm get-

ting fed up being asked to explain names I'm not sure about. Hasn't anyone got any names I can easily explain?

Daphne du Maurier is a funny sort of name, isn't it? It sounds sort of silly and made up, doesn't it?

Dr Vernon Monicker writes: Yes, it does, doesn't it? Of course, many well-known names in England have a foreign origin, but once we get used to them they no longer sound exotic. One thinks of Bronte and de Glanville and Portliff and Dallaglio... Don't evade the subject, you don't know the origin of Daphne du Maurier's name, do you? Dr Vernon Monicker writes: Of course I do. But before we leave the subject, you might be interested to know that in Italian "aglio" means "garlic".

Dr Vernon Monicker writes: Well, that means that the name of the current captain

of the English rugby team - Dallaglio - means, in Italian, "from the garlic" or "of the garlic".

Fascinating. So what does Daphne du Maurier's name come from?

Dr Vernon Monicker writes: From the word "daphne". This refers to a kind of flowering shrub known - coincidentally - as a daphne. It comes via Latin from the Greek word "daphne", meaning "laurel". So it's interesting to know that Daphne du Maurier and Stan Laurel had the same name! What's interesting about it?

Dr Vernon Monicker writes: Nothing. Sorry. So, what does du Maurier mean, Dr Vernon Monicker writes: Well, obviously "maurier" is a French word referring to a profession like "pâtissier" or "épicer"... Yes, but what profession?

Dr Vernon Monicker writes: Well, obviously, someone who deals with "maures". Which are...?

Dr Vernon Monicker writes: Well, according to the dictionary, a "maure" is a "moor". Not the kind of moors which the people of Bradford and Leeds always claim are five minutes walk from the city centre, but the kind of moors that invaded Spain, and of whom Othello was an example.

So what kind of profession would work exclusively with "moors", then, eh?

Dr Vernon Monicker writes: I don't know. Oh, why won't someone please please PLEASE ask me a name I can explain, like Hempleman-Adams? What does the name Hempleman-Adams come from? I'm sorry - that's all we have time for this week. Dr Vernon Monicker will be back again soon!

Patients no longer – we are all customers now



HAMSIH
McRAE

THE FUTURE OF DRUGS

IT HAS been an extraordinary few days in the drug world: first, the launch in America of Viagra, the small blue diamond-shaped pill which treats impotency, and now the possibility of a drug, or rather combination of two drugs, which might cure cancer by switching off the blood supply to tumours.

They represent two ends of the pharmaceutical spectrum. One is a drug with obvious consumer appeal – just the sort of market-driven product that people flock to buy and the big commercial drug companies love to create. The other represents our more traditional idea of the purpose of medicine: the thing you take to cure you of a grave illness. If it works, and there are inevitably considerable doubts, it will rank alongside vaccination or the first antibiotics as one of the giant breakthroughs in medicine.

It therefore illustrates a tension, which will become more evident, between the pressure on the giant pharmaceutical companies to produce drugs that meet consumer demand (for that is how they will make the most money for their shareholders) and the wider demand from humankind to find drugs that treat the mortal diseases.

Of course there is no hard and fast line between the two: any drug that can treat cancer successfully will have enormous commercial demand. But there is a chasm between, on the one hand, mood-changing drugs like Valium (which damps you down) or Prozac (which cheers you up), both of which have been great commercial successes, and on the other, treatments for diseases like malaria, which will be less profitable because they occur largely in poor countries.

Viagra is towards the Prozac end of the scale. There is tremendous demand for it for obvious reasons, but no purely medical grounds the case for its use is less compelling. Though it treats a distressing condition, some people might think of it almost as a recreational drug. As a result the Health Maintenance Organisations in America are refusing to fund its use. The control of the cost of private sector health care in the US is largely sub-contracted by employers to the HMOs, who therefore carry out a similar gate-keeping function as the NHS does in the UK. Presumably the NHS will take also a similarly sceptical view of its medical value when the product becomes available here.

Is it unfair to suggest that the drug companies are only interested in developing drugs that make profits? Maybe a little, but the hard fact remains that the balance of money spent on research is swinging away from the educational establishments and towards the giant drug companies. The financial markets recognise and indeed demand the focus on profits that the pharmaceutical giants deliver and have reaped their shares accordingly. Pharmaceuticals account for about 12 per cent of the value of the top 100 shares in London, give or take the odd percentage point, about as high as they have ever been. Mean-

while similar pressures are mounting on educational establishments, for as government funds are restricted they have to get sponsorship from commerce to help fund their research.

This shift of the supply of research from educational establishment to commercial company has been mirrored on the demand side by a shift in people's expectations of health care. In the old days drugs were things doctors prescribed to make you better; the consumer took what he or she was told to do. Now, gradually, there has been a shift, with people taking a much greater responsibility for their own health and expecting to have much more say in how they are treated. We are becoming customers rather than patients.

There is one enormously positive side of this: the emphasis on lifestyle as a determinant of health. You see this in all sorts of ways – the decline in smoking, the increasing proportion of people taking regular exercise, the efforts to improve diet and so on. The notion that the fastest way to improve the health of the nation is to encourage a shift in lifestyle is now accepted by the Government, hence the nannyish tone of both this one and its predecessor.

But there is also a less positive aspect. We will not always be the best judges of what is good for us. As the balance of power shifts from producer to consumer, from doctor to patient, some of us will end up living healthier lifestyles, but some will use the new freedom to take drugs that don't make us better but simply make us feel better – for a while.

That freedom will grow. It will grow because we are moving towards a global market for prescription drugs. At the moment what is available and not available is still controlled by national governments. But these governments have different standards: what is available one country is not available in another. Countries have different authorisation procedures, some believing that ultra-stringent testing is necessary before a drug is made generally available, others believing that

We are moving towards a global market for prescription drugs

the balance of advantage is in getting the drug to the consumer as quickly as is reasonably possible. Knowledge about drugs' properties and potential will become universally available through the Internet; drugs are light and easy to transport; and credit cards already provide a global payments mechanism.

At the moment we have a white market in prescription drugs and a black market in illegal ones. Expect a grey market to grow in drugs that are legal and available in some places but not in others. Expect consumers everywhere to regard themselves as the people who have the right to make these decisions, not the politicians in the country in which they happen to reside.

In the next months we are going to see some interesting tests. People here will want to test drive Viagra before it is commercially available. And people everywhere will be prepared to risk taking the cancer drugs long before they have gone through the normal screening procedures – and these are drugs which up to now have not been tested on humans, only mice.

Above all, marketing is going to become a vital component in drug development. Viagra is a good example. Great name that: a combination of virile and Niagara.

Could government take on the task of making happy families?



SUZANNE
MOORE

RELATIVE VALUES

YOU maybe unaware of the fact but yesterday was National Parenting Day. I was so unaware of it that I carried on as normal. I went to work, my kids went to school, I did five minutes of quality single parenting ("No, you cannot watch *Scream 2*") and took the cat to the vet to insure that she could no longer go around irresponsibly giving birth to kittens that she does not seem interested in communicating with in any way whatsoever.

No one sent me a card congratulating me on my parenting skills, but I expect this is because National Parenting Day is a new invention. It comes as all new inventions must, from the think-tank still unfortunately known as Demos. They have patented the idea in an effort to get away from the rather sectarian Mother's Day and Father's Day and also to publicise their latest pamphlet, *Relative Values: Support for relationships and parenting*, written by Ed Straw, brother of Jack.

The report could be summarised by one of Straw's basic observations: "Happiness is good economics." Unhappiness costs government money. The fall-out from divorce, dysfunction and family breakdown is costly in terms of benefits, crime rates, drug and alcohol dependency. Two questions inevitably follow. What should governments do to make us happier? And is the role of government to insure personal happiness? Clearly Ed Straw thinks that the answer to the second question is yes, arguing for a national programme of investment in education and support for relationships and parenting.

Strong and committed relationships with parents equipped to parent is the ideal. Fine. Indeed many of the things that Straw is arguing for – counselling programmes and agencies to provide help with step-families, redundancy and stress-related illnesses, for instance – already exist in a somewhat shambling form. The novelty of Straw's idea is that all these various agencies should be drawn together into



On the merry-go-round of family life, change, not breakdown, is the rule

Photograph: Bill Ling/TCL

an institution much like the NHS called, he suggests, The National Relationship and Parenting Service. Just as fifty years ago the nation's health became a matter of public policy so, he argues, the same vision and drive is needed to deal with our emotional life.

Apart from this dreadful name – I suggest the word relationship be banned from public discourse altogether – this smacks of Big Brother-style intrusion into people's private lives. Most people may want support when things go wrong but they don't want to be told

that the populace can be counselled into compliance. If we are aware of the economic cost of family breakdown then we must surely also be aware of the economic causes. Family life has changed, rather than broken down, as women have entered the work-place; and no amount of "relationship education" will stem the repercussions of this.

Straw is right to suggest that we know already what works. We know for instance that prevention is better than cure when it comes to crime; we know that abuse leads to abuse, that cycles of deprivation can

should incorporate realistic cases of domestic crisis and positive examples of families who work through their problems successfully. Obviously only someone who never watches soaps would make such a proposal. Besides the fact that soaps are popular dramas rather than broadcasts on behalf of The Relationship Party, soaps deal with family breakdown day in and day out. Most of the families in Ramsay Street, Brookside Close and Albert Square have experienced breakdown, reconciliation, death, destruction, drug prob-

tal agency. How far politicians can incorporate the language of emotion that supposedly swept the country after Diana's death into public policy pronouncements is debatable.

Obviously all governments engage in a certain amount of social engineering and most of us support this, whether it is drink-drive campaigns or sex education in schools. Yet despite a willingness to be more open about what causes problems, both personally and politically, for society, there is still a vast avoidance of certain crucial issues.

We are still "in denial" about some of our difficulties. While the socialisation or lack of it of young men has been recently acknowledged as a fundamental problem – a case feminists have made for years – it has now become apparent even to government that unless masculine identity can be reconstructed and adaptive it becomes destructive. Likewise blather on about parenting is no good when fathers refuse to do it or work such long hours that they physically cannot.

So let me just share something with you: buzzwords will not change people's reality. If politicians want to support "parenting", let them leave it to us to choose to be counselled or not. Instead, they can just give us parental sick leave, shorter hours, tax breaks and decent nurseries. That's the kind of family therapy we really need.

People may want support when things go wrong, but they don't want to be told how to do things in the first place, especially not by government

how to do things in the first place, especially not by a government body. Demos, who has never shied away from the concept of social engineering, maintains that one of Straw's proposals are to be seen as moral instruction but as simply educational.

This seems rather a fudge because parts of this government would clearly like to promote family values, while others are wary of what happened to the Tories' Back to Basics campaign. While Straw uses the phrase "holistic government" as though the role of the state was somehow to unite us body and soul in some brave new world where every day is National Parenting Day, many will balk at the implication

and need to be stopped. There already exists a body of knowledge and skills about how to make relationships more fulfilling. Some of it exists in the professional world of therapy, counselling and social work. The rest of it exists in the informal and feminised world of popular culture, which continually instructs us on how to have better sex, better kitchens, better children.

As we have come to expect from Demos publications, the pamphlet is far better at offering novel but traditional political solutions, such as the setting up of a new government agency, than it is at dealing with the actual culture in which we live. Straw makes the bizarre suggestion that soap operas

and HIV education on a scale that Straw could only dream about. No one in *Neighbours* for instance has sex without hours of discussion before hand. Are they old enough? Are they committed? Have they sorted out the sexually transmitted disease aspect? Do their parents know?

The point, then, is that much of what Straw would like to happen is already happening but it is not co-ordinated or legislated for by any government.

How I intend to bait the local party canvassers



MICHAEL
BROWN
ON GETTING HIS
OWN BACK

FOR THE past year I have been living in the real world. After 18 years of gleaming information about political and economic affairs from cosy chats with prime ministers, chancellors and assorted secretaries of states at lunches, receptions, tea room tête-à-têtes and smoking room huddles I am reduced to reading newspapers and watching occasional television.

Being now a normal nobody joining the masses millions of the silent majority I have no opportunity of venting my spleen if I hear or read something that begs a question. In the past I could rant and rave to a government minister either in private, or if he really annoyed me, in the chamber of the House of Commons. If that did not work I could use the full pomposity of being a member of a select committee and take on a hapless foreign secretary or permanent secretary to ask my daft question or peddle my latest hobby horse. Then I could issue a press release demanding his resignation.

Now, I can only do what everyone else does who has no influence on anything: shout at the TV, grumble at breakfast time when the gas or phone bills spoil the day, argue with friends at the dinner table or ring the latest telly poll in the Sun. But hey! Suddenly I receive

a poll card for the London elections. A deluge of Labour party leaflets solicit my vote for "Madge, Josie and David" in marginal Churchill Ward in Westminster to "Get London moving".

Oh bliss it is to be on the other side of the fence. Never in my life have I been canvassed. For every election since I was old enough to vote I have been a committed party worker, candidate or MP out on the stump in all weathers canvassing for votes in gruesome council blocks where, on occasions, I was lucky to escape with my life.

For 18 years, every time I knocked on a door, I waited nervously for the pitbull to be restrained before 15 stone of tattooed brawn confronted me, saw my blue rosette and let forth in ripe Anglo-Saxon howl I, Thatcher and Major had created every ill known to man. At every election, either on my own behalf or in support of a party worker standing for council, I have had to defend the indefensible, blame world recessions, and everyone and everything else except the Tories and myself in order to secure a wretched vote.

Not this time. Having moved to London permanently I am now going to put to good use all the scheming lines and lies voters rightly

use to let politicians know that for a few brief weeks, they, the electors, have the upper hand.

My first opportunity came last Wednesday night. My flat buzzer rang. Down the entry phone (how I hated those diabolical inventions when I canvassed) a drenched young city slicker shouts for all the yobboes in the street to hear that he is my Conservative candidate.

So excited am I that I invite him in and offer coffee or gin and tonic. This is the first time

I cannot wait for either Madge, Josie or David to solicit me for New Labour. I shall hide my photo with Margaret Thatcher on her 70th birthday

in my life I have been canvassed. I want to let off one year of pent-up steam as he suddenly becomes the embodiment of everything to do with the rights and wrongs of the Conservative Party. I want to detain him as I have been on hundreds of occasions, delaying the time it will take him to canvas an endless forbidding street.

I delight in brandishing the Labour leaflet and say, as was said to me so often, "I haven't

got one from the Tories."

Sadly my innate tribal loyalty gets the better of me as I see the foot-wearied bedraggled wretch. No one knows better than I how awful it is for a party foot soldier to be at the mercy of the voter on his home ground.

I confess my past, tell him he has my vote and he trots away happy. I remember how just one pleasant promise of support during a baptism wet three hours on the slog can make up

for 50 abusive variations of "anyone but you". I cannot wait for either Madge, Josie or David to solicit me for New Labour. I shall hide my photo with Margaret Thatcher on her 70th birthday, invite them in, waste their time and pretend to be life-long old Labour. How I shall love to open with, "We only see you at election time." I shall berate them with "this Thatcher in drag principal boy Tony" and

demand renationalisation and huge taxes on the rich. I shall fume about dumping loyal old socialists. What fun I shall have upbraiding them for selling the working man down the River Thames. How I shall enjoy asking why they are privatising the Underground. "Even Thatcher never did that," I shall scream.

Looking at the photos of my three Labour candidates I suspect Madge and Josie, who look as though they've been lifelong Labour workers since Attlee's day, may privately agree with me. David, however, looks the very model of Derek Draper cloning and will probably be nervous as his answers will, no doubt, be electronically monitored by Mandelson at Millbank Tower.

How I look forward to using those trite phrases – "I'll be there on the day", "I'll think about it", "I'll decide when I get there" – that I heard so often when the voter wanted to dangle me on his line. And how, best of all, I shall say that my gammy leg means that at the very least I'll need a Labour car to get me to the polls. "Oh and can I just pop into the betting shop on the way?"

Theo I suppose I'll vote Tory as usual.

The writer was MP for Brigg and Cleethorpes from 1979 to 1997.

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Cosyfeet
The Extra Roomy
Footwear Company

By Nigel Cope
Associate City Editor

Christie's announced yesterday that Francois Pinault, one of France's richest businessmen, had acquired a 29 per cent stake in the business. The shareholding was acquired from Joe Lewis, the Bahamas-

Christie's said it did not know if the share purchase was hostile and it had only been informed of the deal when it had been completed. The company has not yet met Mr Pinault, who controls the £110 Pinault-Printemps-Redoute retail empire.

The price of the transaction was not disclosed as it was conducted off-market. However, analysts said the price might have

The off-market transaction raised eyebrows in the City as the purchase of such a large shareholding at an undisclosed price could lead to a false market in the shares.

Sources close to Mr Pinault suggest that he is a long-term investor who would not necessarily have acquired the shareholding as a prelude to a full scale bid. It is

Mr Pinault knows the Christie's business well. As one of France's foremost art collectors he is a regular Christie's customer with preferences for modern art. He also has an impressive collection of sculptures.

Mr Pinault has struck the Christie's deal using Artemis, a private company he controls. Through Artemis he also owns Chateau Latour, one of the top French wine houses, which he acquired for Fr690m

Mr Pinault, 62, started out in business in 1963 with a timber company. He now has a controlling stake in Pinault-Printemps-Redoute, France's largest retailer which has a stock market value of £10.7bn.

He said yesterday: "I am delighted to have this opportunity to acquire this substantial interest in Christie's. I have long

In February Christie's reported a 20 per cent rise in pre-tax profits to £40.6 before exceptional items in 1997, with auction sales up 20 per cent. Founded in 1766, it overtook its arch-rival, Sotheby's, as the world's biggest seller of fine art last year, conducting auctions with a total value of £1.2bn.

By Michael Harrison

The Government may be cautious about membership but the message from Birmingham was "Get on with it". Next stop Cwmbran.

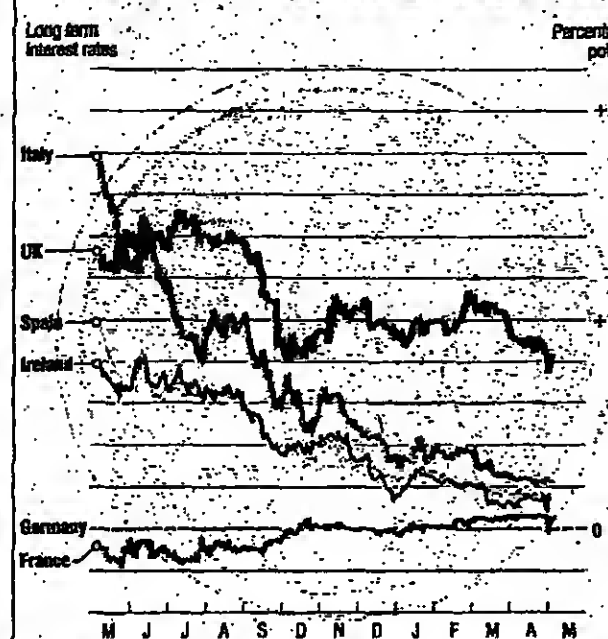
By Diane Coyle
Economics Editor

The Danish central bank raised its short-term interest rate in a surprise move yesterday. Although the move was a response to domestic economic

By Diane Coyle

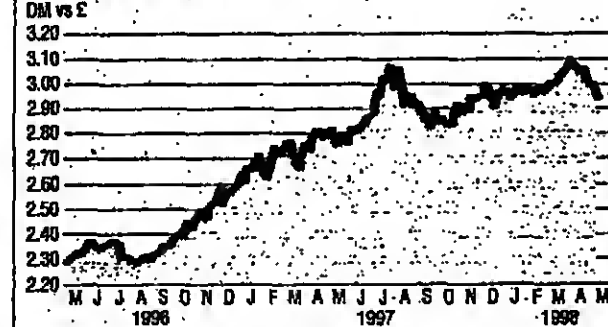
Pessimists see the ungainly weekend deal for Wim Duisenberg, the first president, to step down half way through an eight-year term as an omen of

The road to EMU – the financial markets' view



AWAY FROM EMU: However, if they think the country won't be in EMU, that it will have higher inflation, and that there is a risk of a future devaluation against the mark, then they will demand an extra premium for holding that country's bonds, so the line will move away from the base.

Sterling retreats



Figures from the Bank of England yesterday suggested the trend growth in M0, the narrow money measure con-

Others said the wrangling over the ECB presidency had been fully expected and financial markets would now focus on its future operations.

He also played down fears that the Euro-X council of finance ministers would try to interfere in the new central bank's policies. Mr Bishop predicted it would not step in until it faced its first economic

"That is when the UK will realise that being on the outside really matters," he said.

By Terry Macalister.

John Battle, the energy minister, rejected pleas from the UK Offshore Operators Association that the 18th round of licences be shelved because of low oil prices and uncertainty over the tax regime.

But UKOOA officials said they were unaware of any commitment by the DTI to complete the tax review before licensing was complete. "I am not sure the timing would fit

Investment Column, page 24

By Peter Thal Larsen

The flotation will make multi-millionaires of Philip Hulme and Peter Ogden, Computacenter's two founders, who will both retain a 25 per cent stake in the company, likely to be

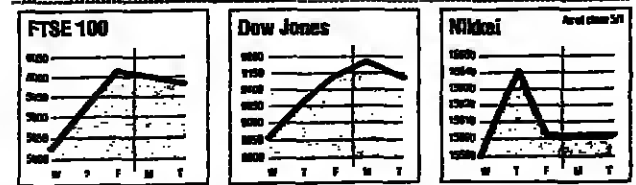
A 15.7 per cent stake is currently held by 700 existing and former employees, in shares and options.

Mike Norris, chief executive, said the flotation would allow

full range of services, has benefited from the trend for large companies to hand over responsibility for their information technology systems to outside organisations.

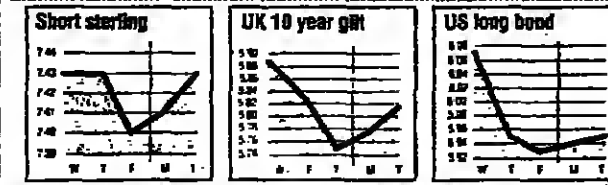
Yesterday in the markets

STOCK MARKETS



Indices	Close	Change	Change%	52 wk high	52 wk low	Open
FTSE 100	5898.50	23.00	-0.41	6150.00	4338.26	5898.50
FTSE 250	5662.30	20.30	-0.32	5850.00	4144.20	5662.30
FTSE 350	2688.70	6.50	-0.23	2838.00	2141.80	2688.70
FTSE All Share	2617.35	-0.11	-0.01	2691.12	2144.50	2617.35
FTSE SmallCap	840.00	7.40	-0.88	875.00	618.00	840.00
FTSE MidCap	1428.00	-7.10	-0.50	1463.80	1025.20	1428.00
FTSE AIM	1090.20	6.00	-0.80	1055.70	965.90	1090.20
FTSE EURO	998.49	-5.04	-0.65	1025.81	897.32	998.49
Dow Jones	6133.50	-40.15	-0.65	6250.70	4488.21	6133.50
Nikkei 225	12611.95	-285.76	-2.24	12870.31	7909.13	12611.95

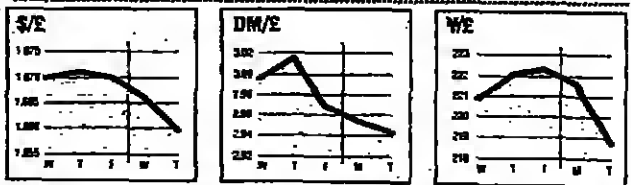
INTEREST RATES



Money Market Rates				Bond Yields			
	3 months	1 yr rate	1 year	1 yr rate	10 yr rate	Long bond	1 yr
UK	7.45	0.89	7.41	0.35	5.81	-1.27	7.75
US	5.69	-0.21	5.69	0.26	5.36	-0.36	5.69
France	6.04	0.04	6.04	-0.12	5.70	2.71	-
Germany	3.65	0.46	3.59	0.62	4.66	-0.78	5.53

MAIN PRICE CHANGES							
	Price %	Chg %	% Chg		Price %	Chg %	%
Carpanelli	380.00	22.00	6.51	Ali & Sports	521.50	28.50	5.46
Glynned Int	261.00	17.00	6.51	Alliance & Ute	632.50	-57.50	-9.09
Int'l Botani	69.50	3.50	5.37	HESS HOLDG	1701.00	-75.00	-4.41
M&E Botani	785.50	5.50	5.37	Asia Card	196.75	-50.00	-25.41

CURRENCIES



Pound				Dollar			
	\$ Euro	Change	% Chg		\$ Euro	Change	% Chg
Dollar	1.6885	-132.50	1.72%	Starting	0.6025	+26.50	4.36%
D-Mark	2.9439	+17.70	5.07%	D-Mark	1.7717	-10.50	0.58%
Yen	218.70	+185.75	2.01%	Yen	131.74	+112.96	0.61%
S Index	105.30	0.00	105.30	S Index	109.50	0.00	109.50

OTHER INDICATORS			
	\$ Euro	% Chg	% Chg
Brent Oil (\$)	14.25	-0.41	-2.87%
Gold (\$)	303.45	-0.70	-0.23%
Silver (\$)	6.24	0.08	1.27%

	Dollars	% Chg	% Chg
GPPI	114.50	2.80	2.44%
RPI	160.50	7.50	4.67%
Base Rates			6.25%

Solidity —

Australia (\$)	2.5082	Mexico (lira)	0.8274
Austria (schillings)	20.24	Mexican (nuevo peso)	12.87
Belgium (francs)	59.47	Netherlands (guldens)	3.2438
Canada (\$)	2.3277	New Zealand (\$)	2.9147
Cyprus (pounds)	0.8429	Norway (krone)	12.04
Denmark (krone)	11.06	Portugal (escudos)	269.04
Finland (markkaa)	8.8212	Saudi Arabia (rials)	0.0687
France (francs)	9.6762	Singapore (\$)	2.5170
Germany (marks)	2.8819	Sri Lanka (rupees)	244.44
Greece (drachmas)	499.88	South Africa (rand)	8.1070
Hong Kong (\$)	12.51	Sweden (krone)	12.50
Ireland (pounds)	1.1436	Switzerland (francs)	2.4206
Indian (rupees)	60.80	Thailand (baht)	57.59
Italy (lire)	5.8949	Turkey (liras)	402113
Israel (shekels)	2.866	USA (\$)	1.6262
Japan (yen)	217.39		

Rates for indication purposes only

Source: Thomas Cook

هكذا من الأصل

PowerGen deal generates many questions



OUTLOOK
ON HOUSTON'S
SECOND STAB AT
THE UK MARKET,
THE ATTRACTIONS
OF THE EURO OVER
STERLING, AND
PROBLEMS WITH
DISCIPLINE AMONG
ACCOUNTANTS

THE LAST time the boys from Houston Industries went a hunting for a British electricity company, they famously came loaded for bear. Unfortunately, somewhere deep in the woods, they encountered Sir Desmond Pither armed with a rocket launcher and that was the end of their ambitions to take over Norwell.

This time around the boot is on the other foot and it is Houston which is being courted by the British electricity generator PowerGen. However, rather than the hunt instrument of a knock-out bid, Ed Wallis is trying out the softly, softly approach and has sidled up to his opposite number at Houston, Jim Rogers, with the idea of a no-premium, all shares merger.

Now there is no doubting the PowerGen chairman's desire to do some kind of deal. Having been barred from taking over Midlands Electricity, he ran the slide rule over Cinergy, the US utility which eventually acquired Midlands. Nor is there much question that PowerGen needs to do something, faced with the prospect of a declining share of the domestic generating market, shrinking profits and little evidence that this Government is better disposed to vertical integration than the last one.

But is Houston Industries the answer? There is no overlap between the two so there are no cost-savings to be had. And PowerGen scarcely needs to go to the expense and trouble of merging with a US electricity retailer to learn how it might attack the UK domestic market once it is liberalised.

Even if the problems of clashing egos, US regulatory approval and how to maintain a quote in blue chip indices on both sides of

the Atlantic could be overcome, such a merger still poses more questions than answers. PowerGen has to ask itself what the point is of merging with a US business which is also beginning to feel the effects of deregulation, increased competition and pressure on margins. Together they could end up like two drums propping one another up at the bar.

If on the other hand, the deal does genuinely fill a hole for PowerGen, then Houston shareholders have to ask what is in it for them, since US utilities are more highly rated than their UK counterparts.

PowerGen has rather been pushed into searching for a big overseas deal by the closing of doors back home and its slowness, compared to National Power, in building up an overseas generating portfolio of its own. But it is a high-risk strategy which shareholders should not encourage by giving Mr Wallis the ammunition.

Euro rift won't prop up the pound

THERE WERE contradictory reactions to the birth of the euro doing the rounds yesterday, each with its own ardent supporters amongst the ranks of the pundits.

One was that the fudge over the European Central Bank presidency signalled a weak euro that would be manipulated by politicians. The pound will therefore rise because sterling is a safe haven from the turbulence of the Continent, argued those who see Mr Duisenberg and Mr Trichet as puppets in the unreliable hands of presidents and finance ministers.

The alternative view was that the ECB deal, however messy, is now history, and there is no way for politicians to interfere in future in the decisions of 17 central bankers with fixed terms of office voting in secret. According to this way of thinking, the ECB, preceded by the Bundesbank during the next few months, will be ultra-tough on interest rates to establish credibility, so the pound will fall.

The pound did drop noticeably against the mark yesterday, taking sterling's fall to 5 pence since a peak of just under DM3.10 on April Fool's Day. The down-with-the-pound tendency was pushing in the same direction as the existing trend. The question is whether the introduction of the single currency will help this welcome trend continue.

There are two good reasons for thinking it will. One is the shifting balance of economic growth and interest rates as the UK economy cools off. The chances that UK rates have reached their peak have increased with the most recent data. A slowdown is now obviously underway. Meanwhile, the German and French economies are picking up slowly, while other euro member economies are steaming ahead. This points to convergence at a relatively high level of interest rates by the ECB when it takes its first vote next January, and by member central banks co-ordinating policy in the run-up to that handover.

The second reason is that, no matter how much investors might regard sterling as a safe haven from Continental storms, there will be many who wish to increase the weight of euro assets in their portfolios. So far, none of the benchmark indices widely used by

investors has incorporated the euro, but this will change over the next six months. When they do, many big investors will be required to adjust their portfolios to reflect those weights, and that means buying euros. Sterling is the obvious candidate for a withdrawal of funds when that happens.

Obviously events might yet outweigh these reasons - a Tiebout resignation, for example, or a relapse into recession in France or Germany. But until some real drama occurs, the pound looks more likely to drift lower than to soar to new heights because politicians could not agree on a choice between central bankers.

Accountants are slow to judge

THERE ARE very few examples of self-regulation left these days but one surviving outpost of the old way of doing things is the Joint Disciplinary Scheme operated by the accountancy profession. Post the great fraudulent collapses of the late 1980s and early 1990s - Brent Walker, Maxwell and Polly Peck, to name but three - the accountants too have felt the wolves at their door. Procedures and disciplines are being overhauled and tightened up, and so far the JDS has managed to keep the politicians at bay. Even so, the accountants seem to have a problem when it comes to hanging members of their own profession, and their disciplinary proceedings remain under close public scrutiny.

Six and a half years after Robert Maxwell fell off his yacht, the JDS finally an-

nounced yesterday that it was proceeding to tribunal with a number of unpublished findings against Coopers & Lybrand, the firm that audited most of Maxwell's interests. The nub of the complaint is that by August 1991, three months before Maxwell died, the firm should have had sufficient evidence of fraud and malpractice to warrant either resigning as auditor or alerting the authorities. Most of us would find this a far from revelatory finding. How could it have taken the JDS so long?

To be fair, the JDS does seem to be going a bit faster than some of its statutory counterparts. The Department of Trade and Industry report into the flotation of Mirror Group has still to see the light of day. Furthermore, civil proceedings over the collapse and the emergence of a conflict of interest meant the JDS's investigation didn't get properly under way until 1995. So maybe it isn't doing too badly. All the same, Chris Dickson, executive counsel to the JDS, must be acutely aware of the criticism of slowness.

Meanwhile, it is the unfortunate lot of Coopers and Lybrand that this has become something of a show case. The accountants have to demonstrate that self-regulation can work if they are to defend their system. Coopers and the four partners has chosen to nail to the cross can therefore expect the harshest penalties to be imposed should the case stick. And because proceedings before the tribunal continue for the time being to be held in private, the public isn't going to have much confidence in any outcome other than guilty as charged. Self-regulation may have its virtues, but for obvious reasons, it can be prone to bad justice.

Swiss clear bank merger

UBS and SBC have won approval for their proposed merger from the Swiss competition commission. Clearance was granted on condition that the banks try to sell 25 of their 550 Swiss branches to a single buyer, dispose of Solothurn, a regional bank, and BSI, a private bank. The banks said talks over the sale of BSI were well-advanced. The two banks now need US approval of their merger plans, and expect to complete their deal in early June.

Rule book

THE FINANCIAL community gave a warm welcome to the publication of a new "user-friendly" handbook on banking supervision policy. The handbook - commissioned in the wake of the Barings collapse - restates and clarifies the rules on banking supervision, and will replace the previous system of issuing "notices to institutions". The new handbook comes into force on 29 June.

CRS losses

CO-OPERATIVE Retail Services came under further pressure to merge with its sister organisation, the Co-operative Wholesale Society, yesterday after reporting spiralling losses despite a heavy investment programme. CRS, which controls supermarkets, funeral parlours and home furnishings stores, recorded losses of £25.6m last year compared with losses of £13.5m in 1996.

Lloyd's gloom

LLOYD'S of London, the insurance market, yesterday issued a three-year profits warning and said members would struggle to make a profit at all on business written in 1998. Despite record profits of £1.15bn for 1995, profits would halve next year as results fed through from 1996. Profits for 1997 would be just £366m, a quarter of their pre-set level.

Menzies sold

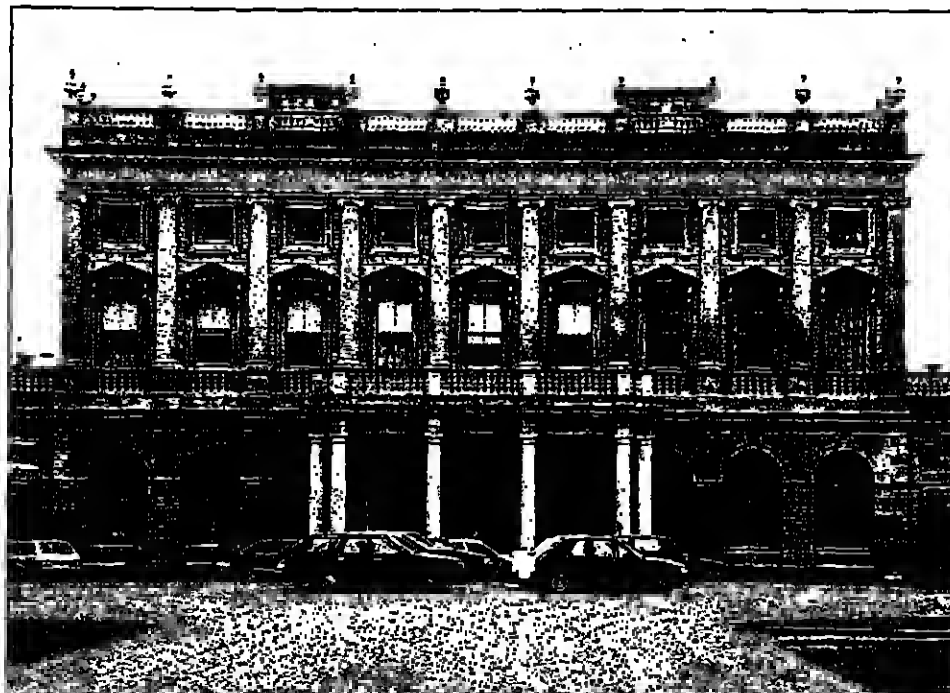
WH SMITH has completed the acquisition of the John Menzies retail chain for £68m. This includes £10m of freehold property which will be sold and leased back. The Menzies stores will focus on books, newspapers, magazines and stationery.

Homes dearer

THE PROPERTY boom is not yet over, according to new figures from Halifax. They show that average prices in the UK rose 0.8 per cent in April compared with a revised increase of 0.7 per cent in March.

Body Shop talks

BODY Shop International yesterday confirmed it was in talks in relation to its US activities. The company said it was "aware of press comment" and confirmed that "discussions have been held in this respect".



Politics, scandal, luxury: Cliveden, now a hotel, is set in 375 acres of park and gardens

Home at the heart of British history may fall to Americans

By John Willcock

CLIVEDEN, the country home of the Astor family and the place where John Profumo notoriously met Christine Keeler, could be the latest national treasure to fall into foreign hands.

The Cliveden group, which owns the Berkshire residence as well as the Royal Crescent Hotel in Bath and the Cliveden Town House in Chelsea, announced yesterday it was in takeover talks after being approached by a potential bidder.

The development comes weeks after the Savoy Group

was bought for £520m by Blackstone, a US investment company.

It is the Americans who are leading the race to buy Cliveden. Medhurst, a US property group, has emerged as front-runner. However, it may face competition from other US property companies such as Starwood and Patriot which have used their special tax status to launch acquisition sprees in recent years. Several UK hotel groups are also understood to be interested, raising the prospect of a bidding war.

Sources close to the group

suggest that John Lewis and John Thum, who co-founded Cliveden, are keen to sell and have been encouraging buyers to make an offer. Both stand to become millionaires.

Cliveden's shares rose 12p to 91.5p valuing the group at £41m.

Cliveden, which was at the centre of the Profumo scandal, is part of British political history. Formerly the home of a Prince of Wales, three dukes and three generations of the Astor family, the house has been turned into a hotel, which is set in 375 acres of National Trust park and gardens.

Kingfisher builds position in Germany

By Nigel Cope
Associate City Editor

KINGFISHER, the B&Q and Comet group, underlined its ambitions to become a pan-European retailer yesterday when it agreed to pay up to £250m for two German electrical businesses.

Under the deal's complex structure Kingfisher is paying an initial £50m for 60 per cent

of Wegert, based in Berlin. The sum also includes a deal to buy Promarkt Holdings, another electrical business with a stronghold in southern Germany and Luxembourg. Kingfisher has options to buy the remainder of Wegert for £20m to £202m depending on performance.

"Strategically, the deals make sense but there are some concerns about the eventual price," one analyst said. "If it

ends up at £250m that would look far too expensive."

The two acquisitions will give Kingfisher almost 2 per cent of Germany's fragmented electrical retail market. Metro, Germany's largest retail group, has the largest share with 10 per cent.

Analysts said the deal could herald a move by Kingfisher into the German DIY market. There has been consistent speculation about a possible move for Hornbach, a German DIY

retailer which has held talks with Kingfisher before.

Kingfisher has been building a European business for several years. It already owns Darty, the French electrical retail chain, as well as businesses in Holland and Belgium.

Wegert last year made profits of £6.3m on sales of £237m. Promarkt made £222,000 on sales of £164m. Kingfisher shares closed 16p lower at 1,046p.

Tribunal to judge role of Maxwell's auditors

By John Willcock

COOPERS & Lybrand and four of its partners are to face a disciplinary tribunal this summer over its role as auditor of the late Robert Maxwell's business empire, in a case which is set to drag the role of accountants in company failures back into the public arena.

Chris Dickson, the executive counsel to the accountancy profession's Joint Disciplinary Scheme (JDS), said yesterday he had completed his investigations into Coopers, and he hoped the Joint Disciplinary Tribunal's findings would be published by the end of the year.

If found guilty, the firm, which is in the process of merging with Price Waterhouse to create the world's biggest professional services firm, could face "unlimited fines".

The individuals could face expulsion from the Institute of Chartered Accountants, a move which would prevent them from operating as chartered accountants.

A spate of spectacular collapses during the last recession by companies soon after they had seemingly been given clean bills of health prompted attacks on the idea of self-regulation. Since then the accountancy profession has fought a rearguard action to retain its role in regulating itself.

Many observers see the impending hearing by the JDS Tribunal as the profession's "last chance".

A senior QC and two accountants, yet to be appointed, will consider a number of complaints against Coopers concerning the Maxwell pension funds. Mirror Group News-

papers and the tycoon's private businesses.

Robert Maxwell died in November 1991 when he fell off his yacht off the Canary Islands. His empire of over 400 companies, almost all of which were audited by Coopers, then collapsed, revealing a £400m "black hole" of missing pension funds.

Mr Dickson said yesterday that he had laid complaints against Coopers concerning "the Maxwell pension funds" and a number of other matters.

One of his complaints concerned "the firm's consideration, by early August 1991, of its position in relation to the Maxwell entities for which it acted".

The complaint continued: "Coopers should have considered whether there was evidence of fraud, other irreg-

ularities, defaults or unlawful acts necessitating a report to a proper authority."

Coopers issued a statement saying that it had been aware for some time the JDS's executive counsel had been considering whether to refer the case to a tribunal and added that it would "co-operate fully with the process".

The firm, which is being sued for alleged negligence over its role as auditor to the Maxwell group of companies, had sought to have the JDS investigation postponed. But, although Price Waterhouse succeeded in delaying a similar examination of its actions over the collapsed Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI), the High Court dismissed its action in late 1994.

Outlook, this page

Liffe still losing ground to rival

By Andrew Verity

LIFFE, London's troubled futures and options exchange, is continuing to lose ground to its arch-rival in Germany, according to figures published yesterday.

The London exchange's market share of the prestigious German Bund (Bond) future slipped to just 19 per cent last month, with the Deutsche Terminbörse (DTB) taking the remaining 81 per cent. Liffe's share was down from around 30 per cent in March and 70 per cent last summer.

The volume of Bund futures traded on Liffe more than halved during April. Liffe traded 1.56 million Bund contracts last month, down from 3.23 million in March.

However, the figures revealed that Liffe continued to dominate trading in the more complex short-term interest rate (Stir) products, with Stir volumes up 58 per cent in the year to date.

An exchange spokesperson attributed Liffe's success with Stir products to the exchange's

"open outcry" method of trading. DTB uses an electronic trading system.

The spokesperson said: "The Bund future is a much more simple contract and can be applied to current electronic trading platforms. Stir products are more complex, and there is currently no electronic trading platform that can replicate the trading of these products in the pit."

Liffe's board is due to meet later today to try to hammer out detailed plans for the future of the exchange. Liffe's 215-strong membership has already endorsed plans to cut the size of the board and introduce a full-time chairman, in an attempt to streamline decision-making.

On 21 May, members will vote on plans to introduce a state-of-the-art electronic trading system as well as proposals for ownership reform. At today's meeting, the board is expected to discuss detailed reforms of the share structure as well as the contentious proposal to sever the link between share ownership and trading permits.

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THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

EDITED BY ANDREW YATES

BP shows its mettle

THE OIL sector was one of the glory boys of the stock market last year, driven upwards by a soaring crude price and huge "elephant" discoveries in new areas like Angola and the Caspian.

How quickly the industry has fallen from grace. Investors have pulled out of oil stocks faster than Michael Schumacher clears the pits. The share price of exploration and production companies has plummeted the most. The oil price is stuck around the \$14 per barrel mark.

City opinion is divided on whether the sector has been oversold and is ripe for a comeback. Certainly there are noises from within the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries that a second production-cutting package might be on the cards. If that happened and prices did finally begin to rise towards the Opec goal of \$17 then a re-rating of the sector would certainly be in order.

But regardless of oil price changes, some stock prices have managed to weather the storm. Shell has risen by 20 per cent year on year while BP is up by a healthy 36 per cent.

BP showed more of its mettle yesterday by beating 22 out of 24 analyst predictions in announcing first quarter profits, before exceptional items, of £582m. That was 22 per cent down on last time but oil majors generally have averaged a 38 per cent fall and earnings at Chevron and Texaco have almost halved.

The oil price was \$7 lower than the same quarter last year but BP was cushioned by a strong performance in the downstream sector, where profits rose by 32 per cent on last time.

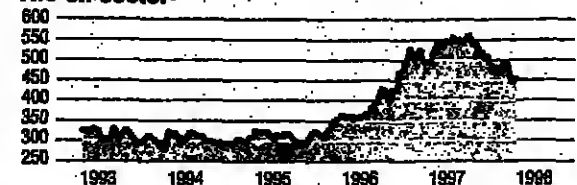
Chief executive John Browne summed up the situation, describing the results as "good in a very tough climate". He added: "We've seen improvements in trough-cycle performance in all businesses, and there is more to come in the rest of the year." But the

British Petroleum: At a glance

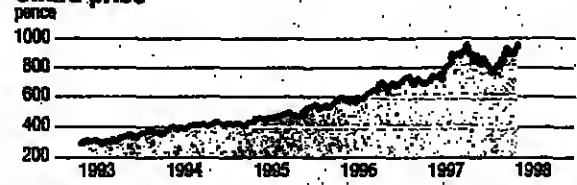
Market value: \$54.4bn, share price 938.5p (-13.5p)

Trading record	95	96	97	97	98
Turnover (£bn)	50.2	59.4	56.8	11.95	8.45
Pre-tax profits (£bn)	1.9	3.7	3.6	0.98	0.48
Earnings per share (p)	20.2	45.5	43.3	10.6	4.7
Dividends per share (p)	15.3	19.5	22.9	5.25	5.75

The oil sector



Share price



Source: Datastream

reality is that unless Opec gets its act together, BP's earnings are likely to look pedestrian for the next year or so.

Profit taking pushed BP's share price down 13.5p to 938.5p yesterday. SG Securities has the oil major on 1998 profits of £2.3bn, putting it on a forward multiple of 24. Hold.

More than a box-shifter

GIVEN British investors' current hunger for information technology stocks, Computacenter looks assured of a good reception when it joins the market later this month.

The mooted price range of £0.9bn to £1.1bn may look a hefty price to pay for a company which made post-tax profits of just £31m in 1997. But it's a token of how rapidly valuations for British IT companies have soared in the past few months that a historical price/earnings multiple of between 30 and 37 begins to look like a bit of a bargain.

Is this reasonable for a company which some - harshly - classify as nothing more than a

glorified box-shifter? Well, perhaps. It is true that Computacenter is essentially a distributor: it buys computer hardware and software from the likes of Compaq and Microsoft and sells this on to its clients.

This can be a volatile, low-margin business, but to lump Computacenter together with other distributors is to misunderstand the unique nature of its business. Essentially, the company has used its contact with customers as a supplier of kit to build up a sophisticated range of services. Customers - which include half the FTSE 100 Index - now call on Computacenter to plan, requisition, implement, support and manage their computer networks.

This no-stop shop approach accounts for the vast bulk of profits, and explains why it can sustain a gross profit margin of over 20 per cent.

Growing demand has helped Computacenter's profits to almost quadruple in the past three years. And given the continuing shift away from mainframe systems towards networks based on personal computers, that growth looks set to continue. Goldman Sachs, the investment bank which is

managing the flotation, predicts post-tax profits of £40m this year and annual growth of around 20 per cent thereafter.

All this makes Computacenter shares good value right up to the top of the share price range, set at 550p-670p. But don't chase them any higher.

Incepta thinks big

PUBLIC relations firms are never backward at coming forward, especially when talking up their own fortunes, as David Wright, chief executive of Incepta, proved again yesterday.

Not only does he want to make Incepta, which owns the Citigate PR outfit, a global player. He envisages doubling its current market capitalisation in little more than a year and plans to quadruple it within three years through acquisitions in Europe and North America.

The group was formed a year ago by the reverse takeover of the existing marketing company by Citigate. So far everything has gone to plan.

The group comfortably beat forecasts yesterday when it announced pre-tax profits of £5.6m for the year to February. Of course advertising, public relations and marketing are all cyclical businesses in competitive markets, where a group can grow very rapidly and equally quickly lose its way. But we are probably still some way off reaching the peak.

And the ambitious expansion plan looks sensible, given that only firms with critical mass and a complete range of services stand much chance of winning the lucrative accounts of international companies.

The company's broker, Beeson Gregory, yesterday increased its forecasts for the current year from £6m to £6.7m and looking for £8.3m in the year to February 2000. The shares edged up 1.75p to 24.75p yesterday. At 12 times forecast earnings, falling to 10 the year after, they are still cheap relative to rivals like WPP and Abbott Mead Vickers.



Vodafone, Britain's biggest mobile telephone company, is slashing off-peak consumer call charges by 50 per cent to 5p per minute from 10p from 1 June. The company said the new tariffs - which it called the UK's cheapest off-peak calling rates - would be supported by a £2.5m advertising campaign. Announcing its

second set of price cuts in six months, Vodafone said tariffs between 7pm and 8am Monday to Friday and all weekend would start from only 2p per minute for those subscribing to its local call saver option. The move is also designed to make cellphone prices more competitive with fixed line alternatives. Photograph: Mykel Nicolaou

Pentair tops £94m bid for Vero Group

VERO Group, the electronic components firm, was yesterday "considering its position" after Pentair of the United States said it was making a cash offer valuing the company at around £102.2m.

Vero said in a statement it would make a further announcement in "due course". Pentair's 170p-a-share offer for Vero tops the £94.4m recommended bid at 157p-a-share from Applied Power. Pentair said it was seeking a recommendation from Vero.

Vero's share price closed up 7.5p at 180p. The latest offer represents a premium of around 43 per cent to Vero's share price on the day before it an-

nounced, in March, it was in talks which might lead to an offer.

Pentair said it expected the acquisition to be "modestly accretive" to earnings per share in 1999.

"The acquisition of Vero represents... an excellent opportunity for Pentair to strengthen the position of its electrical and electronic enclosures group in two fast-growing segments - the data networking and telecommunications equipment markets," Pentair's chairman and chief executive, Winslow Buxton, said.

Vero would gain access to expanded distribution and marketing for its products, he said. "We strongly believe that

our offer is in the best interests of the shareholders as well as the customers of Vero and hope that our offer will be promptly recommended by the board of Vero."

Applied Power also said it was "considering its position" in the light of the Pentair bid and would make a further announcement in due course.

The rival bid from Pentair was not unexpected, but the market had been waiting to see at what price level it would be pitched, market sources said.

Pentair is a diversified industrial manufacturer based in Minnesota with a market capitalisation of \$1.6bn (£1bn). - Agencies

IMF terms spark riots in Indonesia

By Stephen Vines
in Hong Kong

AFTER a delay of nearly two months Indonesia was finally given the second tranche of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout, totalling almost \$1bn. However the strict terms under which the loan was made have contributed to an outbreak of rioting in the Indonesian city of Medan. This

in turn unsettled the financial markets and share prices slid over 2 per cent.

Originally Indonesia was scheduled to receive \$3bn on 15 March but the IMF said it was unhappy about the government's willingness to implement a reform programme it believed had been agreed. A flurry of talks were then held.

Yesterday it became clear that not only has the disbursement been cut by a third

but it also came accompanied by a warning from the IMF that the rest would not be paid if there was more back-sliding.

On Monday the Indonesian government ended fuel subsidies, which sent the price of petrol and kerosene, used by the poor for cooking, soaring. The government also ended the dove monopoly in the hands of President Suharto's son Hutomo Mandala Putra.

INDEPENDENT

ON SUNDAY

Photograph Offer



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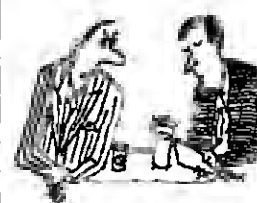


Huggate, near York by John Voos

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PEOPLE & BUSINESS

JOHN WILLCOCK



YESTERDAY'S move by the accountancy profession's Joint Disciplinary Scheme (JDS) against Cnopers & Lybrand over its role as Robert Maxwell's auditor comes as the current issue of *Financial Director* magazine reveals that the late tycoon would almost certainly have passed the corporate governance checklist devised to prevent a repeat of "the Maxwell scandal".

Putting the 1991 Maxwell Communications Corporation (MCC) annual report and the Mirror Group Newspapers (MGN) prospectus to the test in the light of the proposed super-code amalgamation of the Cadbury, Greenbury and Hampel corporate governance reports, the magazine concludes that Maxwell would have acquitted himself well on paper, if not in his real-life dealings.

The checklist covers the super-code key principles concerning directors, directors' pay, relations with shareholders and auditor procedures. Both MCC and MGN score highly,

even outperforming other conglomerates.

FD concludes: "The unenvying truth is that the public, official face of Maxwell was quite acceptable to the City." I knew it: perhaps he wasn't such a bad chap after all. I'm sure the DTT's report into the Mirror's flotation, when its finally published, will bear this out.

THE LONDON Business School (LBS) in Regent's Park has got a new team at the top, led by John Quelch, a former Harvard Professor who became Dean of the LBS on 1 July. Vani Treves, senior partner at Macfarlanes, the law firm, and chairman of Channel Four, becomes the chairman of the governing body. Martin Sorrell, chief executive of WPP Group becomes the deputy chairman.

The school also has three new governors: The redoubtable Dame Sheila Masters, a partner at KPMG and a director of the Bank of England; Jonathan J. Ledecy, chairman and chief executive officer of Consolidation Capital Corporation, a facilities management company; and Robert F. White, a managing director of Bain Capital, a private equity firm based in Boston, Massachusetts.

Mr Treves takes over the role of head of the governing body from Lord Sainsbury of Turville, who has spent eight years as chairman. Lord Sainsbury remains as a governor.

Mr Treves commented yesterday: "There is a great deal of ambition and promise in the air of Regent's Park." I must get down there and sniff some immediately. I wonder if you can bottle it. Hang on a minute, there's a business opportunity here....

OVER to the west of the capital lies the LBS's rival, Henley Management College, which holds its degree ceremony this Saturday. The shindig will include the first MBAs to be awarded by Henley itself.

There was concern, however, when Sir Roger Hurra of Smiths Industries, chairman of Henleys' board of governors, couldn't find his ceremonial cap for the forthcoming degree awards, where he is due to lead the proceedings.

He was just about to order another one when he found his cap in the garage - where he had left it after a grouse shooting trip.

I'VE NOTHING against people publicising their case, but the people organising the "Millennium Bug Economic Breakfast Seminar" this Thursday have gone a bit over the top.

Describing one of the speakers at the event at the Dorchester Hotel, Jan Timmer, the organisers write: "Chairman of the Millennium Platform, The Netherlands, Mr Timmer's appointment by the Dutch Prime Minister, Mr Wim Kok, was a stroke of political and economic genius."

Cripes. The organisers go on: "Considered to be the most influential year 2000 czar

in the world, he has utilised his power base at Philips, possibly the most influential company in the Netherlands, to galvanise both private and public sectors into meteoric action on year 2000 issues since his appointment."

Blimey. As if this wasn't enough about the man who has downsized thousands of Philips employees, Insurance Specialist proclaims: "referred to as 'the Gary Lineker of the Netherlands', recently he can do no wrong in the eyes of the Dutch public."

Come on Jan, hand the crisps back....

I HAVE received a press release informing me that now Peter Childs has been appointed director of the professional services division in UK, Ireland and the Benelux countries for BEA Systems, "a leading provider of distributed mission critical enterprise middleware solutions".

Remember when people used to write in plain English?

THIS is much more like it: "DIAL-A-DRINK", a service which delivers booze and soft drinks to your home, has just been launched in York. The sooner it reaches my area the better....

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25/SHARES

Second liners continue to scale new peaks

MARKET REPORT



DEREK PAIN

IT WAS a market of two halves; blue chips marked time as mid and small cap shares stretched to new peaks. The euro's difficult birth, with the attendant worries of higher European interest rates, quickly killed off an early blue chips' advance but the rest of the stock market was in fine form.

The FTSE 250 index ended 29.3 points higher at 5,682.3 and the SmallCap index improved 8.4 to 2,665.3.

The day's performance was a continuation of a trend which started in late January. Until then Footsie constituents romped ahead, creating a huge value gap with the rest of the market, which seemed destined to drift aimlessly.

The undercard rally has been dramatic and many experts believe the second and third liners, helped by the arrival of new market-makers, will continue to move ahead.

Footsie scored an early 54.3 gain. It was an unrealistic

mark up, prompted by New York's record high. Buyers stayed away. Blue chips went into reverse and, by the close, Footsie was down 23.8 at 5,986.5.

The weaker pound continued to help exporters with British Steel up 5.5p to 167.5p and GKN 40p at 1,778p.

PowerGen, the generator, was at nine times 33p higher as the market built on the takeover inspired rise. The shares ended at 825p, up 18p.

The group is thought to be in talks with Houston Industries, the auctioneer, responded to Joseph Lewis' departure with a 13.5p gain to 256p. The Lewis 29 per cent stake has gone to Artemis, a French investment group run by Francois Pinault.

Music group Boosey & Hawkes' reorganisation, which killed hopes of a bid following the Carl Fischer retreat, was greeted with a predictable off-put response - a 137.5p fall to 637.5p. Last year, on hopes the Carl Fischer withdrawal would

prompt a bid for full control, the shares touched 1,062.5p.

Cliveden, the upmarket hotel group, gained 12p to 91.5p after duty confirming a bid approach. Hanover International, long regarded as a bid target, put on 6p to 139.5p.

The excitement engulfed

Thistle Hotels where Brierley Investments, reconsidering its investment policy, sits on 46 per cent. The shares improved 9.5p to 186.5p.

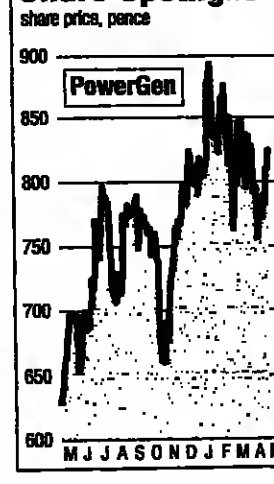
Brierley is thought to be unhappy about its Thistle involvement and, indeed, the chain's weak share performance. It could be prepared to sell out, which could leave the company wide open to a bidder.

CSFB, the old BZW helped the Thistle growth by moving its stance from hold to buy.

H Young, the distributor, firmed 2p to 152.5p after splashing out £5.1m for Leeds, the nation's largest distributor of fishing tackle, and £1.4m for Powerline, a branded power supplies group.

JWE Telecom made a ringing debut, closing at 125p against a 103p placing. On Offer, Applian Traffic Technologies, placed at 20p, closed at 35p. It is the 200th company to be listed on the fringe market.

Share Spotlight



TAKING STOCK

JOHN GUNN, the 1980's entrepreneur, has nudged up his stake in West 175 Enterprises, an AIM-traded company which produces "lifestyle" television programmes and connected books and merchandise. He has acquired 10,000 shares, lifting his interest to 4.87 per cent. His modest buy spurred the shares 10p to 65p. They were placed at 125p nearly two years ago. The price has been down to 50p.

CARLTON Communications and Granada are due to hold a City investment presentation on Friday. Subject is their joint digital television operation due to start towards the end of the year. Carlton shares shaded 2p to 518p; Granada rose 28p to 1,075p.

FIBERNET, the national communications network group, will make further losses - perhaps £2.5m - this year but produce profits of £6m next year, believes stockbroker Greig Middleton. The shares are 300p, up 2.5p.

The football up and downs had an impact. Tottenham Hotspur's Premiership survival lifted the shares 3p to 72.5p. Again on Offer, Arsenal lost an early £100 gain to settle unchanged at £2,800. But Manchester City fell 10p to 85p.

Aspen, a marketing and specialist printing group, fell 11p to 101p as expected bidder, US group Quastus, decided to walk away. Last month Photobit failed to agree a takeover.

AEA Technology firmed to 721.5p as Pamure Gordon put an 860p price on the shares.

Arriva, the transport group, hardened to 424p with 2 million shares changing hands, a deal which could signal the end of a selling programme. Investment meetings are planned this week.

Ankett, an architect, gained 1.75p to 82.5p after gaining orders worth £100m, which add up to £3.5m in fees.

Share Price Data

Prices are in sterling except where stated. The yield is the latest twelve months' declared gross dividend as a percentage of the share price. The price/earnings (P/E) ratio is the share price divided by last year's earnings per share, excluding extraordinary items but including exceptional items. Other details: R - right; S - dividend; E - 1st; S - 2nd; P - 3rd; P - 4th; P - 5th; P - 6th; P - 7th; P - 8th; P - 9th; P - 10th; P - 11th; P - 12th; P - 13th; P - 14th; P - 15th; P - 16th; P - 17th; P - 18th; P - 19th; P - 20th; P - 21st; P - 22nd; P - 23rd; P - 24th; P - 25th; P - 26th; P - 27th; P - 28th; P - 29th; P - 30th; P - 31st; P - 32nd; P - 33rd; P - 34th; P - 35th; P - 36th; P - 37th; P - 38th; P - 39th; P - 40th; P - 41st; P - 42nd; P - 43rd; P - 44th; P - 45th; P - 46th; P - 47th; P - 48th; P - 49th; P - 50th; P - 51st; P - 52nd; P - 53rd; P - 54th; P - 55th; P - 56th; P - 57th; P - 58th; P - 59th; P - 60th; P - 61st; P - 62nd; P - 63rd; P - 64th; P - 65th; P - 66th; P - 67th; P - 68th; P - 69th; P - 70th; P - 71st; P - 72nd; P - 73rd; P - 74th; P - 75th; P - 76th; P - 77th; P - 78th; P - 79th; P - 80th; P - 81st; P - 82nd; P - 83rd; P - 84th; P - 85th; P - 86th; P - 87th; P - 88th; P - 89th; P - 90th; P - 91st; P - 92nd; P - 93rd; P - 94th; P - 95th; P - 96th; P - 97th; 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England selectors choose experience over inspiration as mastering pressure situations becomes the priority

Crunch time for captain Stewart

By Derek Pringle
Cricket Correspondent

IT IS A rare thing for full-time captaincy to elude someone for 75 Tests, for it suggests that important qualities are lacking. For Alec Stewart, named yesterday as Michael Atherton's successor as England captain, the eventual promotion has come more by default than from the possession of outstanding leadership qualities, though few would perhaps begrudge such an unstinting and loyal foot soldier the chance to swap his khaki for the braid of higher office.

Stewart, now 35 and looking smarter than a Burton's dummy at Lord's yesterday, is the first Surrey player to lead England since 1961, when Peter May was captain against Australia. Although he has captained England twice before—in 1993 after Graham Gooch fell ill—Stewart will be in charge for the five-match Test series against South Africa next month as well as the one-off Test against Sri Lanka in August.

If one such elevation is usually enough for a county to celebrate, the appointment yesterday of Adam Hildrick as one-day captain will have made it doubly joyful, and the Prince of Wales' feathers will probably be seen flying from every flagpole in SE11 for the next week.

Mind you, that Hildrick has only been appointed for the T20 matches this month and not the triangular tournament in August does suggest that the selectors are perhaps getting cold feet over the dual captaincy. If they are, Stewart's role, as one of a handful of players worthy of both Test and one-day places, could expand even further. Indeed, it would not be too far fetched to see him installed as England captain for next year's World Cup.

Speaking after David Graveney, the chairman of selectors, had made the formal announcement yesterday Stewart immediately scotched suggestions that he was about to put the lid on English cricket's Pandora's box once and for all.

"Obviously I'm not going to wave a magic wand and suddenly make everything hunky dory," Stewart said. "What we will be doing is our best to be competitive and to be consistent. If we do that, then we've a chance of being a good side."

Unlike Atherton, who in the end chose not to vote, Stewart



Alec Stewart, England's new captain, faces the press alongside David Graveney (centre) and Adam Hildrick at Lord's yesterday

Photograph: David Ashdown

art has decided to be a part of the selection process, and is very certain of the kind of player he wants. "They must have the will to win. Be desperate for success, and be proud of playing for their country. In fact our biggest challenge is to learn how to come out on top in the crunch situations," he said.

With the final choice being between just two candidates—Stewart and Nasser Hussain—the decision by Graveney and his selectors, Graham Gooch and Mike Gatting, was, in the end at least, a unanimous one. "The deciding factor in Alec's favour," Graveney said after-

wards, "was his experience and respect within the team."

The history of Test cricket is not exactly littered with captains who have kept wicket; a role Stewart will almost certainly have to perform this summer if England are to play a five-man bowling attack. For England, yet to win a five-match Test series since 1986/87, a major worry must be that too much responsibility is being heaped upon their most important player.

Having to perform three vital jobs at once invites compromise and Stewart, despite an oft-stated preference for opening—something his Test batting

average also bears out, being 47 without the gloves and 32 with—will bat at either three or four, providing he keeps wicket.

But even if Stewart is happy in himself about the move down the order, any further drop in Atherton's currently modest form could leave England with an inexperienced pair of opening batsmen.

English cricket may have stopped shooting itself in the foot quite as often as it used to, but facing the new ball partnership of Allan Donald and Shaun Pollock without Stewart or an in-form Atherton to combat them would be handing the

opposition a huge advantage. Stewart, a big fan of Atherton's, counters this by saying he would be surprised, despite one newspaper's ridiculous claims that the Lancashire man would no longer be welcome in the England dressing-room, if his old partner was not opening the innings in the first Test at Edgbaston.

If 35 seems an odd time to be fulfilling one's boyhood dreams Stewart, as he has already done with his batting, takes inspiration from the example of Gooch: "I always look at Graham Gooch, who took on the job for the first time

at about the same age and kept playing Test cricket past the age of 40. Like him, as long as I'm good enough, I'd like to play for England as long as possible."

Ironically, it was probably due to this similarity in outlook and style as Gooch's vice-captain that persuaded the selectors to overlook him in favour of Atherton following Gooch's resignation as captain in 1993.

Perhaps therein lies a possible problem. Gooch, Gatting and Stewart are so like-minded that a more questioning mind, such as Hussain's, might have forced the selectors to search more deeply for solutions than they

may otherwise do. As it is, Stewart expects to be able call on both Atherton and Hussain for advice.

With Australia to follow this winter, Stewart could not have wished for a more difficult 12 months in which to rectify his record of two losses from two Tests in charge. Pointing out that it will not be easy is an understatement. In Stewart, England have one of the great survivors and players of the last decade. They also have a man intent on teaching England how to win. Let us hope the learning curve is a steep one.

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Anelka included in France squad

Football

By Mark Burton

NICOLAS ANELKA, who made his international debut only last month in Sweden, was the surprise inclusion when France's preliminary 28-man squad for the World Cup finals was announced yesterday.

Anelka, joined in the squad by his Arsenal team-mates Emmanuel Petit and Patrick Vieira, may not make it to next month's finals because France's coach, Aimé Jacquet, will reduce the squad to 22 by 2 June.

The 21-year-old defender Franck Leboeuf was also chosen, along with West Ham's goalkeeper, Bernard Lama, but there was no place in the squad for either the Upton Park club's new signing, the midfielder Marc Koller, or Tottenham's David Ginola.

Ian Wright will have the opportunity to increase his chances of pushing his way into England's World Cup squad when he plays for Arsenal in their Premiership match at Liverpool tonight.

The club's record goalscorer came on as a substitute during Sunday's 4-0 victory over Everton that brought Arsenal the title, but he has not started a first-team game since mid-January.

France's selection of the Arsenal trio—Anelka in particular—reflects their successful season, but success brings increased pressures to a club and its staff as well as reward. Milan have made an approach for the Highbury club's Premiership-winning coach, Arsène Wenger. However, Arsenal have responded by opening talks with the Frenchman on a five-year contract that is believed to be worth £5m. It would follow on from his current deal, which runs until the end of next season.

The new Scottish Premiership finally became a reality when the Scottish Football Association approved the historic change. The first new professional league in Scotland for 108 years will start next season with 10 clubs.

The SFA Council and members yesterday ratified their executive committee's approval of the breakaway teams' proposals to bring to an end a saga that began late last year when the Premier Division clubs announced their desire to resign from the Scottish League and join new set-up, enabling them to control television and sponsorship rights.

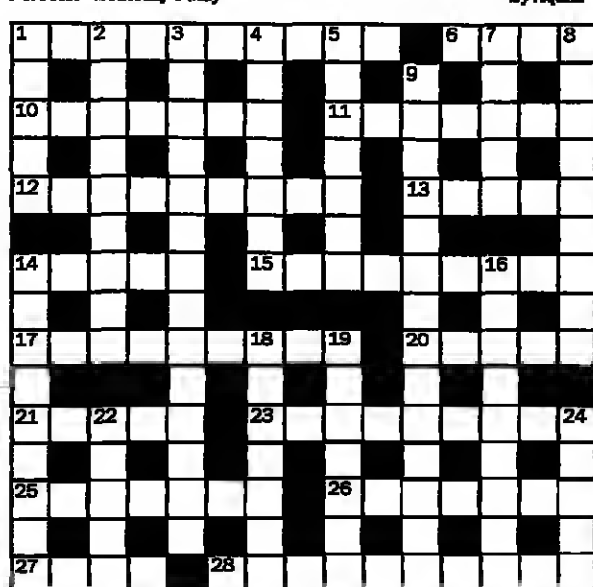
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THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3603, Wednesday 6 May

By Aquila

Today's Solution



Across
1 Beef death in be resolved, and provide with advantages (7-3)
6 He accompanied Robin Hood a lot (4)
10 Post at university advantageous? (7)
11 Gangster fitting cowl in chimney (7)
12 Staff in declines keep standards up (9)
13 Crack up in apex tolerated (5)
14 Direction in which all players contribute (5)
15 Eugenia preparing wine to put before cider-maker (4-5)
17 Faces woman, throwing pie with glancing blow (9)

ACROSS

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DOWN

- 1 Down-stage mistake (5)
- 2 How sailor responded, having released tension by psychoanalysis (9)
- 3 Office of senior minister (4-10)
- 4 Rabbit on road, an excellent specimen of its kind (7)
- 5 Lydia's part in moving sheep over America (7)
- 7 Dark place of retirement in France (5)
- 8 Most plain in America is superlatively unpretentious here (9)
- 9 Jet monorail due to be developed—the pair coming to grief? (5,3,6)
- 14 Garish flat? (9)
- 16 Many-faced figures heard about at college (9)
- 18 Mark, prime suspect on ship (7)
- 19 Honour England's opening pair—impressive! (7)
- 22 Oil-producer's order not recorded (5)
- 24 Spore scattered in lines (5)

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Fastidious, fierce and groomed for the top

PARADED before the cameras and microphones at Lord's yesterday, Alec Stewart delivered the kind of performance we can expect to become typical during the months ahead. Self-assured without being cocky, positive without being unrealistic, patriotic but not jingoistic, courteous but not fawning.

As a matter of form, he paid generous tribute to his predecessor, a good deal of which was born of genuine admiration. There will not be much of Michael Atherton, however, in Alec Stewart.

For a start, he will never be seen sprouting stubble, whether fashionable or not. Stewart's grooming is immaculate. He resembles, it has been said, an old-fashioned American golf pro. With his close-cropped hair and his upright stance, others liken him more to a marine, especially when he thrusts out his chest and strides forth to fulfil his duty on the field, each innings approached as a military mission. He loves his country. So much so that, if he had his way, the England team would start every Test match by signing the national anthem.

He has been accused of being superficial and has at times mocked himself for having a personality that lacks depth. None the less, he plays and lives with an uncluttered philosophy.

Put another way, he has made himself the consummate professional. Summer and winter, he trains every day, determined at 35 years old to keep himself at his physical peak. He

Immaculate image hides a hard edge. Jon Culley on the new man in charge

fastidiously minds what he eats and takes alcohol only occasionally. He also keeps videos of himself in order to analyse and correct technical flaws.

What is more, he is fiercely competitive—too much so, it was said, in his younger days. In part, this was inherited from his father, Micky, the former Surrey captain whose hard-edged brand of management changed England's whole attitude to Test cricket. He credits his father with instilling the view in him that dedication and commitment are as important as ability and that self-belief is paramount. "He told me that if I did not back my ability, why should anyone else," Stewart once said. "That is not arrogance, just common sense."

When he won his first Test cap, Micky was in charge, which inevitably led to suggestions of nepotism. In fact, although Alec would teasingly call his father "manager" at home, in a cricket setting the two went out of their way not to acknowledge their relationship. Ian Greg, Alec's predecessor as Surrey captain, believed that far from enhancing his Test career, parental involvement held it back.

It was Australian grade cricket that made a fighter of Stewart. From the age of 18 in 1981

he went to Western Australia every English winter for seven years, playing for the Perth team Midland-Guildford. He kept wicket and because he would bat only once a week learned to make every innings count.

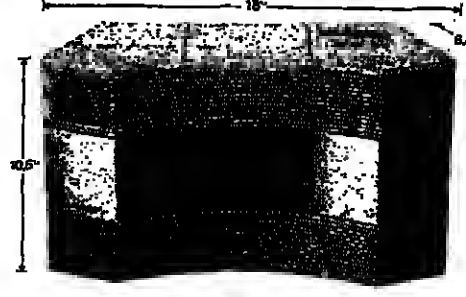
He also learned how to attack an opponent verbally, which did not attract the universal approval of his peers and most certainly not of his masters. In only his second Test, he became embroiled in a slanging match with Desmond Haynes and on his first tour was fined for dissent after overreacting to an umpire's decision.

He was accused, like his father to some extent, of having the mentality of a footballer, although given both their pasts this should come as no surprise. Micky played professionally for Charlton Athletic, while Alec turned out for Corinthian Casuals in the Isthmian League when he was 17 and for a long time was more interested in a career in the winter game.

But having chosen cricket he has reached this point in his career with no doubts over his ability or his temperament. The only unanswered question, curiously, concerns whether, as a captain, he is a winner. If the shadow cast by his father bothers him at all it is because under Micky's leadership in the 1950s, Surrey dominated the County Championship, winning title after title. During his own five-year tenure at The Oval, from 1991-96, only in the final year, in the Sunday League, did a team awash with talent come up with a trophy.

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